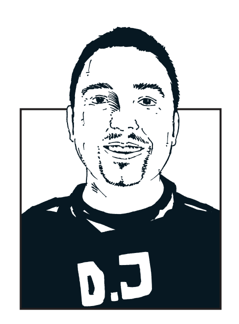
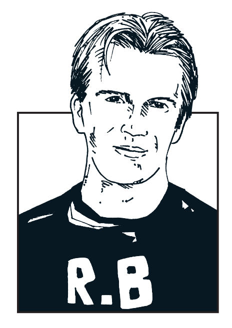

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THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE MICROPROSE GAME



DARRAN JONES

Magic: The Gathering – Duels Of The Planeswalkers. Yes, it's a little bit long in the tooth now, but my love of Magic: The Gathering knows no bounds. A very impressive release despite its history.
Expertise: Juggling a wife, magazine and two kids
Currently playing:
Bioshock
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

Pizza Tycoon on the PC for the opportunity to make kipper pizzas then call in the Mafia to damage the competition and make some money gun running. Think *Mugsy* with a pepperoni topping. Silly but entertaining…
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
The Lost Vikings
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



STUART HUNT

After some tense aerial dogfights in *F-19 Stealth Fighter,* I like nothing more than to sit back and unwind with six rounds of *David Leadbetter's Golf.* Tiger who?
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
Favourite game of all time:
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



CRAIG GRANNELL

Without doubt, *Civilization II,* which stole far too many hours of my life. Thankfully, *Civ Rev* on the DS is a bit pap, or I'd never get anything done.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Kirby Super Star Ultra
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



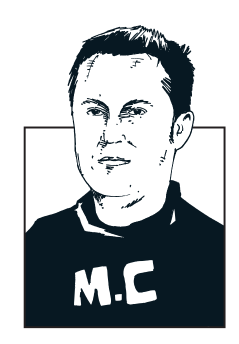
PAUL DRURY

Sid Meier is clearly a major figure in the history of game development, but when I hear MicroProse, I just think of *MicroProse Soccer* on the C64, which was fun but not as good as *Emlyn Hughes.* Sorry.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Frak!
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

Although I love the flight sims and *Civilization,* I spent weeks playing *MicroProse Soccer.* The beautiful game was never better… well, until *Sensible Soccer* arrived anyway.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy,* Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Catch-Up (and *Spore*)
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

I ploughed hours into *F1 Grand Prix* on the Amiga, but in all honesty I had more fun with Geoff Crammond's earlier game, the crazy *Stunt Car Racer.* Whatever happened to the rumoured update?
Expertise: Films shot in Arrivision 3D
Currently playing:
Hunchback: The Adventure
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



In the next few days (of me writing this, not you reading this) I'm heading off to meet Jon Ritman and if I'm completely honest I'm kind of nervous about it.

I've always been a huge fan of his work and while I've spoken to him several times over the phone and corresponded with him via email, I've never actually met him face to face.

Although I've now been fortunate enough to meet several classic developers from the good old days, I still can't help but feel painfully self-aware whenever I'm around them, mainly because there's something strange, almost reverential, about being around someone who had such a huge impact on your childhood, even though they were never there.

The difficult thing here, though, is what do you ask a developer who's had to answer the same old questions a hundred times before? Of course, many of you will no doubt feel that I'm rambling on and that this is just an excuse to boast about how fortunate I am. You could well be right, but that doesn't mean I'm not still nervous.

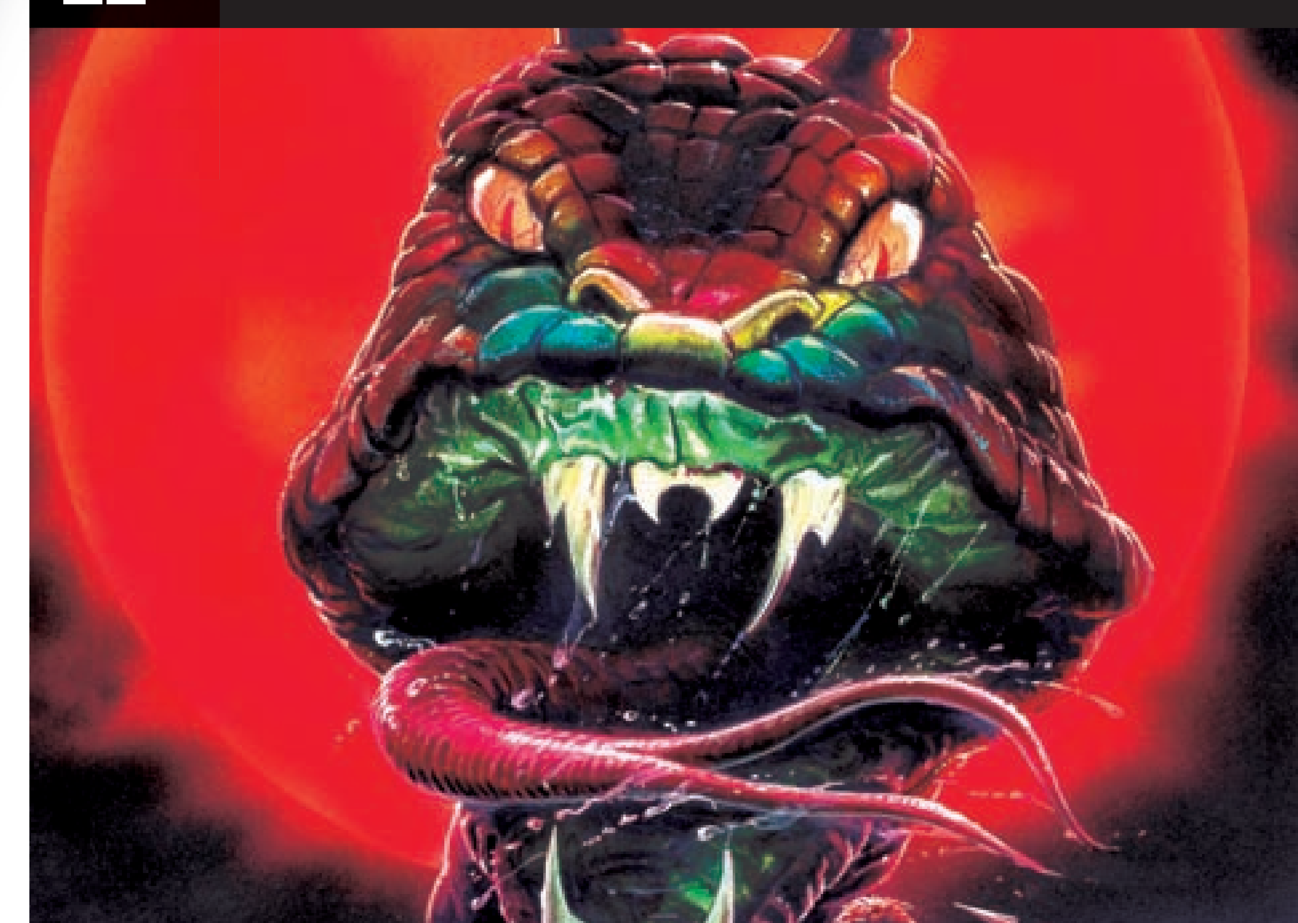
Enjoy the magazine





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BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES







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At-a-glance retro sections…

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DESERT ISLAND DISKS

76 HE'S WORKED ON SOME OF THE UK'S MOST POPULAR GAMES MAGAZINES, BUT WHAT'S EUGENE LACEY UP TO NOW AND WHAT DOES HE THINK OF CURRENT VIDEOGAME MAGS? PAUL DRURY FINDS OUT…



RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING…

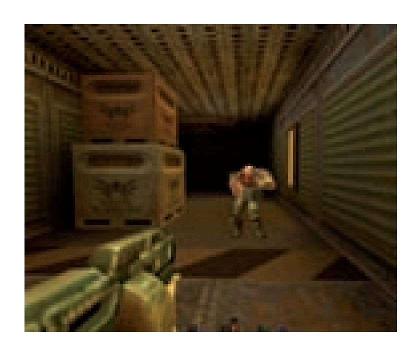
If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



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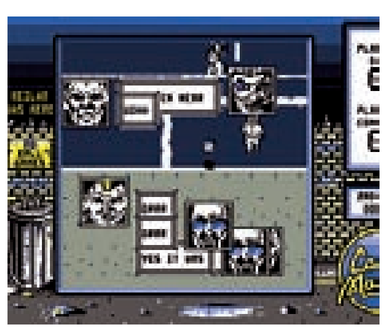
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THE CLASSIC GAME

QUAKE II

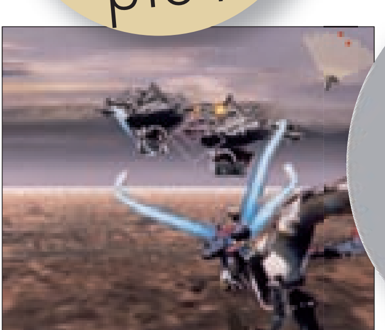
64 Not content with resetting the FPS bar with *Quake*, id came along with a sequel that was even better.



RETRO SHAMER

STREET GANG FOOTBALL

82 There have been many poor football games, but this one's so bad, even the players aren't interested in it.



THE MAKING OF…

PANZER DRAGOON I & II

84 In a special two-part series we speak to the creators of one of Sega's most loved and imaginative franchises.



WE TUSSLE WITH THE WORLD WARRIORS

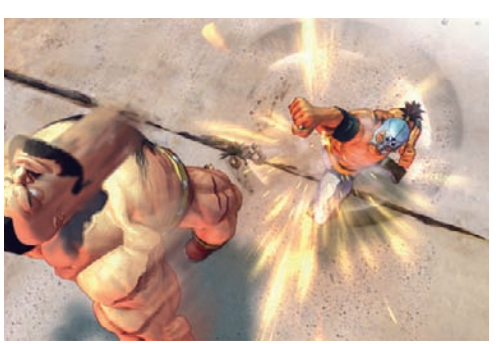
WE GIVE YOU OUR FIRST OPINION ON STREET FIGHTER IV

We've finally played it, and we can honestly say, hand on heart, that *Street Fighter IV* lives up to expectations – it's a thing of nostalgic brilliance. Maybe our gushing love for the game is down to the fact that we first experienced the game on an arcade machine, or maybe it was the sight of seeing a throng of sweaty, excitable gamers swarming en masse towards our games room. Whatever it was, at times, *SFIV* transported us back to a time when we were lovingly feeding shrapnel into its true forebear, when we were anxiously wanting to sample every one of its eight fighters in action, and when we were just utterly content with standing there and taking in other people adjusting to and mastering the game.

The longest-running fighting franchise has defiantly gone back to its roots. This is *Street Fighter II Turbo*, but fused with *3rd Strike*-isms and then rebooted in 3D. While it may sound like a messy marriage of muddled eras and jarring styles, what it actually represents is a brilliant culmination of the franchise. As we've followed the game in our news section, we've always said we wanted to see the series go back to its most prolific period. Don't get us wrong, we're huge fans of *3rd Strike*, but there's no hiding the fact that the 3D fighting genre has felt somewhat limp of late.

To compare *SFIV* to *3rd Strike* would be missing the point. *Street Fighter*'s reappearance, if it's to succeed, really needs to be a game that will reinvigorate the genre, bring fighting games back to the fore – as it once did all those years ago – and attract a whole legion of new, as well as old, blood. The sad truth is a 2D fighting game, regardless of how great it plays, will never be strong enough to draw any kind of crowd in this day and age. Capcom clearly knew this and has worked hard to try to appease everyone, almost wiping the slate clean, making the game accessible to newcomers, while at the same time, offering the depth and gravitas that fans have come to expect.

The controls have been practically lifted from *3rd Strike*, with taunts and throws still performed using dual button jabs. And *Strike*'s sublime parry system is replaced with 'Focus Attacks', which work in a similar way but now offer your fighter more control over the potency of the counter. Every character from *World Warriors* features, including the bosses, and there are a few new faces too, such as Crimson Viper, Abel, Rufus, El Fuerte and new boss Seth. And that's not all, bonus characters in the arcade game include Akuma and older brother Gouken – who trained Ryu and Ken. Capcom is also said to be adding Dan, Fei Long, Cammy and Sakura to home versions. Mark our words, this is going to be the fighting game of this generation.








Little Mac socks Glass Joe with a dazzling uppercut in both new and old versions of the classic game.

PUNCH-OUT!! IS COMING TO Wii

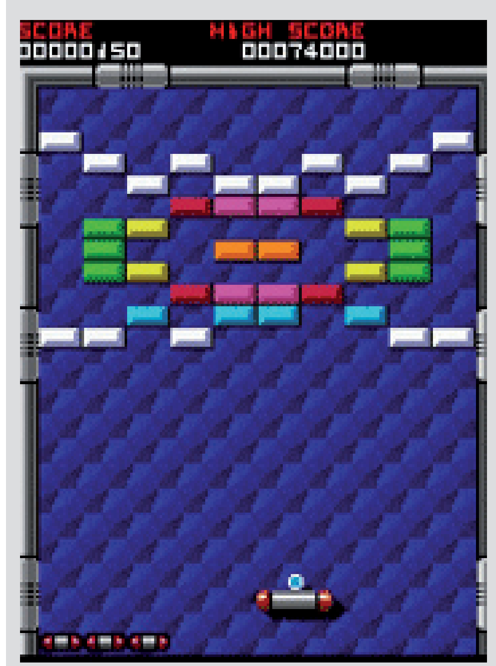
NINTENDO'S MIGHTY PRIZEFIGHTER RETURNS TO THE CIRCUIT



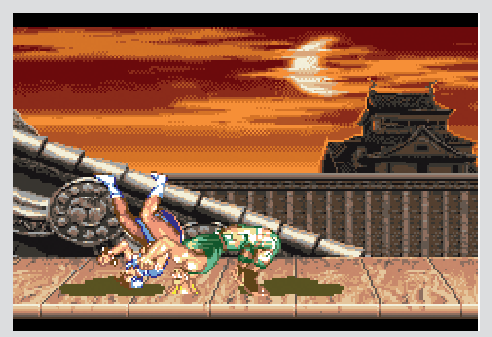
Now, if we were a cynical bunch here at **Retro Gamer** we would say that this news had an air of predictability about it. Nintendo is no stranger to a franchise reboot, and the latest IP to get a dusting off will be *Punch-Out!!*, which is said to be skipping and sparring its way on to Nintendo's Wii in 2009. Information on the game is a little on the sparse side at the moment, but Nintendo did unveil a sneaky trailer of the game in action.

It appears that the reboot is going to be reverting back to the NES era. The recently released trailer shows a pugilist who doesn't look too dissimilar to Little Mac from the original games – complete with a black vest, green shorts and green boxing gloves – taking on some familiar faces. Getting a pasting are old foes Glass Joe, Von Kaiser and fans' favourite King Hippo. As well as the fighters, the iconic music also appears to have been wholesaled over – just hearing it kick in when we were gawping at the trailer was enough to put big grins on all of our faces. As you would probably expect, the visual style of *Punch-Out!!* appears to have been suitably ramped up for the Wii, and the considered duck, weave and sting gameplay looks like it's, thankfully, been retained. This could prove to be a real haymaker for the Wii.

RETRO GAMES GO MOBILE







100 PER CENT RETRO GAMING FROM O2 AND 100% MOBILE

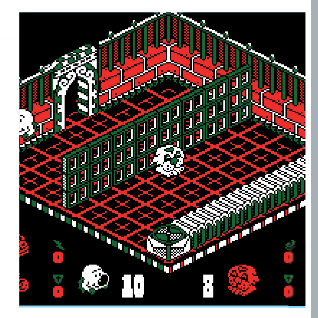
Mobile service provider Player X has teamed up with O2 to stage a special retro gaming-fuelled week – via its portal 100% Mobile – featuring some of the very best retro mobile-phone games around. Starting on 7 November, the line-up currently includes *Arkanoid*, *Galaxian*, *Pac-Man* (and his missus), *Space Invaders* and *Street Fighter II*, among many others. And getting your hands on these games couldn't be simpler.

100% Mobile allows you to 'try before you buy' through time-limited versions of the game, and offers a 'pay-per-play' rental service allowing you to dip in and out whenever you feel the need of a quick fix of nostalgia. On top of this, there is also the option of subscribing to a game – £2 will get you unlimited play for a whole month. Also, browsing and downloading from 100% Mobile promises to come with no hidden data charges as you only pay for the games that you want to play.

O2 customers who are interested can text 'TRYGAMES' to 2020 to get a direct link to the 100% Mobile portal.



LAST-MINUTE NEWS



Head Over Heels is just one of the games featuring on *Classic Games Crusader.*

EMI GO RETRO

We've just discovered that EMI is releasing a retro DVD in February 2009. Presented by games enthusiast Iain Lee and created by production house Phoenix Film & Television, *Classic Games Crusader* looks set to deliver a huge rush to your nostalgia gland. Features will include a unique 'Director's Commentaries' on certain hit games. Iain and the game's programmer chat while watching a playthrough sent in by a fan (who'll also be present for the commentary). Phoenix is looking for talented gamers, so if you're a fan and ardent player of either *Manic Miner* (Spectrum), *Head Over Heels* (CPC), *Paradroid* (C64), *Pitfall* (Atari 2600), *Ghosts 'N Goblins* (Arcade) then contact Phoenix producer Anthony on anthonyc@phoenixmedia.co.uk. More news when we get it.

COMPETITION: WIN A PYRAMAT GAMING CHAIR



If you're currently looking for a way to feel physically satisfied while playing *Rumble Roses* then Pyramat's new gaming chair could be the answer to all your prayers.

The seat's breathable mesh fabric backrest makes the perfect spine-accessory for those wanting to play videogames in a complete state of relaxation – that is, of course, until you hear the two full-range 12-watt ARX surround sound speakers, and the heavy-duty five-inch subwoofer, this baby also comes fitted with.

To be in with a chance of winning one, all you need to do is simply send us a photo of your sofa – the most beaten-up, rat-infested, beer-sodden picture we receive will be deemed the winner, and its owner can finally kiss goodbye to a life of multiple flea bites and crippling arthritis and look ahead to a future of comfy gaming.

Email answers to retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk, or post them to Retro Gamer Competition, Imagine Publishing, 33 Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ. Competition closes on 28/11/08.

[Terms and Conditions]

1.This competition is run by Imagine Publishing

2.By entering our competition, you agree to be bound by all rules relating to the competition (and which may be changed at any time without notice).

3.This competition is open to all residents of Europe and other PAL territories excluding employees of Imagine Publishing and Pyramat Limited, their families, suppliers, agents, associates or anyone professionally associated with this competition. Entrants under 16 years of age must have a parent or guardian's permission to enter. Only one entry per email address is permitted. Multiple entries from the same email address or from the same individual will be counted as one entry. Imagine Publishing may request proof of eligibility to enter the competition.

4.In the event of any dispute, Imagine Publishing's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

5.All eligible entrants who register before midnight on 27/11/08 will be entered into the competition. Winners will be drawn on 01/12/08.

6.First Prize will be one Pyramat Gaming Chair.

7.All prizes are non-transferable, no cash alternative will be offered. We reserve the right in our sole discretion to substitute any prize with an alternative of comparable value. All prizes are subject to the terms and conditions of the manufacturer or supplier.

8.The winner will be notified by email. To claim the prize the winner must confirm acceptance within 30 days.

9.The winner consents to the use of their name and image being used for publicity purposes.

10.These competition Terms and Conditions shall be governed by, and construed in accordance with English law and are subject to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts



HERO OF THE MONTH

LITTLE MAC

HERO OF THE MONTH
Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Little Mac from *Punch-Out!!*.

First appearance: *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*

Weapon of choice: Fists

Most likely to: Punch above his weight

Least likely to: Fight dirty

Unusual fact: Nintendo released two versions of *Punch-Out!!* in the arcades, *Punch-Out!!* and *Super Punch-Out!!*.

BRADFORD GOES RETRO

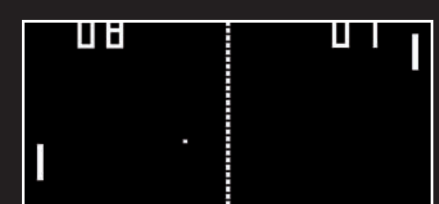
RETRO GAMING FINALLY GETS THE RESPECT IT PRESERVES

An image of the archive's most valuable and sought after treasure.

Academics at Nottingham Trent University have been working alongside the National Media Museum in Bradford to help archive the history and origins of videogames.

Located inside the National Media Museum, and managed by Nottingham Trent Uni, the archive will contain a bevy of rare and classic game consoles and cartridges, as well as game art, game ads and other game-related media. The plan is to ensure the preservation of valuable and historically important videogame objects d'art for generations to come.

Dr James Newman, from Nottingham Trent University's Centre for Contemporary Play, had this to say: "The National Videogame Archive is an important resource for preserving elements of our national cultural heritage. We don't just want to create a virtual museum full of code or screenshots that you could see online. The archive will really get to grips with what is a very creative, social and productive culture."



retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…



Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



NOVEMBER

SONIC UNLEASHED

Released: 7 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99-£49.99

Format: Wii, PS3, 360

No Stefan McGarry this month, but it's only a matter of time (or straight away if you've picked up this issue late) before you get to witness the brilliance of *Sonic Unleashed*. With hand on our hearts we can safely say that it's a fantastic return to form for the blue hedgehog. What with this and *Sonic Chronicles* (see review on page 95) we're in *Sonic* heaven. How long will it last though?



NOVEMBER

BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUT & BOLTS

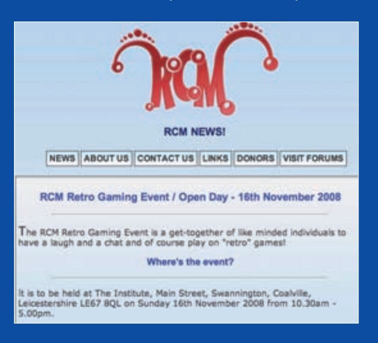
Released: 14 November

Publisher: Microsoft

Price: £49.99

Format: 360

With Rare being the secretive chaps that they are (even Wil kept schtum when we grilled him at Fusion '08) we've had to rely on our sister mags for news on Banjo and Kazooie's third outing. Luckily, the skinny sounds promising, with the wacky duo's third outing greatly expanding on the gameplay of the original two hits. We can't wait!



NOVEMBER

RCM RETRO COMPUTER MUSEUM

Opens: 16 November

Location: The Institute, Main Street, Swannington, Coalville, Leicestershire

Entry: £3.50 (adults) 50p (children)

Website: www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk

Leicestershire is clearly the retro capital of the world as yet another retro event is happening there very soon. A dry run for the museum that site owner Andy plans to set up, the day will feature high-score competitions and plenty of consoles and computers to enjoy. Don't miss it.



NOVEMBER

TOMB RAIDER: UNLEASHED

Released: 21 November

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £34.99-£49.99

Format: Wii, DS, 360, PS3, PC, PSP

Now that those extremely embarrassing publicity shots for the new Lara are out of the way, we can simply sit back and wait for *Underworld* to arrive. The excellent *Uncharted* for PlayStation 3 has really raised the bar since *Tomb Raider Anniversary* came along, so *Underworld* is going to have to be something very special indeed. We have faith though.



NOVEMBER

BANJO-KAZOOIE

Released: 26 November

Publisher: Microsoft

Price: 1,200 Points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

The classic N64 hit with shiny hi-res visuals? Yes please! *Banjo-Kazooie* is our favourite N64 platformer of all time (yes, even more so than the amazing *Super Mario 64*), so we can't wait to see what it looks like in stunning high definition. With the fabled Stop 'N' Swop now fully implemented (it's for crossover use with *Nuts & Bolts*) this could well be the best update ever.



NOVEMBER

CASTLEVANIA: JUDGMENT

Released: 28 November

Publisher: Konami

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

We'd be lying if we said that we weren't concerned about *Castlevania: Judgment*. Konami doesn't exactly have a stellar reputation for creating one-on-one fighters (*Turtles Tournament Fighters*, anyone?) and many will wonder why the developer didn't just opt for a *Metroid Prime*-style approach instead. Still, we'll reserve judgement (ho ho) until we see the final product. Fingers crossed, eh?



NOVEMBER

AGE OF EMPIRES: MYTHOLOGIES

Released: 28 November

Publisher: THQ

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Considering the Nintendo DS is the perfect platform for strategy titles, we've certainly had to wait a fair amount of time for them to appear. Fortunately, the latest *Age Of Empires*, with Greek, Norse and Egyptian cultures all covered in the game, looks like it should be more than worth the wait. If this is half as good as the recently released *Civilization* we will be very happy indeed.



DECEMBER

CHRONO TRIGGER

Released: 5 December

Publisher: Square Enix

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Final Fantasy III and *IV* proved to be great updates for the DS, so we can't wait to see what Square Enix achieves with *Chrono Trigger*. Easily one of Square's and the SNES's best RPGs, this update features similar 2D sprites, but will utilise the DS's touch and dual screens to create a new *Chrono Trigger* experience. Throw in the cut-scenes from the PlayStation upgrade and the end result is another killer update from Square Enix.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER

ODE TO RETRO GAMING

Dear Retro Gamer,
I've been reading with amusement all the letters bemoaning too much coverage of certain consoles and computers within the magazine, so felt it was time to settle this with a little poem: 'Everyone's Right And Wrong' by Matt Lewis.



» Whenever we print a picture of Sonic, we always use one when he's running through this loop. We don't know why.

'But that's not retro,' the Spectrum supporter said,
'If this Mega Drive coverage continues, then **RG** may as well be dead.'
'Oh, come on now, you're being so silly,' came the Mega Drive owner's quick and indignant reply,
'For to me, viewing the simplistic graphics of *Jet Set Willy* is akin to getting stabbed in the eye.'
'Guys, guys, why can't we all just get along?' the Amstrad owner quickly chipped in,
But of course, both the Spectrum and Mega Drive fanboys didn't bother listening to him.
For you see, when it comes to the subject of 'what's retro', no one's really right and no one's really wrong,
So why the hell can't you put aside all of your differences and simply get along?

Matt Lewis, via email

Many forum members will no doubt be bored to tears by yet another letter on the 'what is retro?' debate, but at least you've put together something in an original way that actually made us smile, Matt. Help yourself to a T-shirt and binder for doing something a little different to the norm.

BARGAIN BRIC-A-BRAC?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Please help me! You're my only hope (unoriginal I know).

I've just bought a retro games console for what I hope is the bargain price of 20 quid at a local bric-a-brac market. The only problem is that I know nothing about it. There's no date on the box or instruction manual, and I can't find a listing for it on eBay.

It's called a 'Prinztronic Micro Ten' and as you can see from the pictures I have sent you, it has Atari 2600-style artwork and seems to be from around the same era.

I would be very grateful if you could dig up some info for me. Keep up the good work with the brilliant mag.

Yours frustratingly, Chris Thorpe

We're sorry to have to be the bearer of bad news, Chris, but unfortunately your bric-a-brac find isn't actually that much of a bargain we're afraid. A quick search on eBay reveals that this machine generally tends to sell for somewhere around the £15 mark. Still, your Micro Ten is in fantastic condition and as long as you're enjoying it that's the only thing that really matters.



» Here's Chris's recently purchased Prinztronic Micro Ten. It is in fantastic condition for its age, but isn't exactly a rarity. Still, nice find though.

ALL HAIL DEFENDER

Dear Retro Gamer,
Thank you for your excellent article on *Defender* in issue 55. Like most other kids at the time I was absolutely mesmerised by its blistering speed when I first saw it. It was fantastic, even if I did only last a few moments before getting blown to bits whenever I played it.

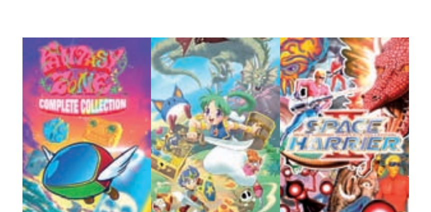
Fortunately, I had a Texas Instruments TI-99/4A at home, which was hardly a classic machine for games by any stretch of the imagination, but I nevertheless learnt to programme on it and also had a copy of Atarisoft's *Defender* cartridge, which turned out to be a cracking conversion.

I managed to score over 1 million points on it, which was my best gaming



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…





» (Left to right) *Fantasy Zone*, *Wonder Boy* and *Space Harrier*, just a few of the arcade classics covered in Sega's *Sega Ages* range.

performance ever and it's all thanks to Eugene Jarvis!

Robin Flegg, Middlesex

We're pleased to hear that you enjoyed our Defender *article in* **Retro Gamer** *issue 55, Robin. We agree, it is incredibly difficult to play through, but it's just so damned satisfying when it finally all comes together. Oh, and that's a pretty impressive score you achieved as well.*

PLAYSTATION NEW?

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was looking through all of my PlayStation 2 games recently and found out that the *Sega Mega Drive Collection* has a lot of classic games on there which I remember playing in the arcades when I was younger.

What I want to know is why Sega has never brought out such classic games as *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, *Super Wonder Boy*, *Wonder Boy*, *Power Drift*, *After Burner* and *Space Harrier* for the PlayStation 2.

These are all classic games and I would have loved to play them on my PlayStation 2. I think Sega should release a classic games compilation with all these arcade games on, as I'm sure I'm not the only person who would love to purchase it.

Yours Sincerely, Andrew McGeown, Cheshire

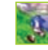
There's good news and bad news, Andrew. First of all, the good news is that many of these games are actually available on the PlayStation 2. The bad news is that most are only available in Japan under Sega's Sega Ages *range. Unfortunately, some of the earlier 3D remakes aren't actually that good, but more recent releases have all featured very impressive conversions from various systems that are well worth tracking down. If you don't feel like chipping your machine then a few of the titles did make it to the UK in the form of the* Sega Classics Collection *that can now be picked up quite cheaply.*

EVERY MONTH, **RETRO GAMER** ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW...

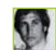
YOUR FAVOURITE MICROPROSE GAME?




ID: Coopdevil
The Ancient Art Of War In The Skies on PC, an unusual mix of 'lite' WWI wargame with *Sopwith*-style arcade sequences. Nobody else in the entire world apart from me appears to have played it though.

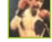

ID: SuperFamiKing
Is *Stunt Car Racer* allowed? If so, then that! Spent about a year of my life trying to complete it.


ID: Fred83
Gunship. The manual was good too, it gave you something to read while you waited for the game to load.


ID: jdanddiet
I'm a huge Julian Gollop fan and I seem to remember that MicroProse published *X-Com: Enemy Unknown*. Massively involving and atmospheric.


ID: pforson
So many great games. *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, *Master Of Orion*, *Formula One Grand Prix*. The list is endless. But I'm going for *MicroProse Golf*. Best golf game on the Amiga bar none. I really love golf and this game scored a hole in one!


ID: necronom
MicroProse has published some of my favourite games. *Formula One Grand Prix* is the racing game I've probably spent more time on than any other, *MicroProse Golf* is my favourite Amiga golf game (nothing since has been better that I have played), and *UFO: Enemy Unknown* is probably my favourite turn-based game.


ID: Scapegoat
F-15 Strike Eagle on the Atari 8-bit. I remember waiting for what seemed like a year between the first adverts and the actual release, and playing it solidly for weeks after I got my grubby little hands on it.


ID: the_hawk
MicroProse Soccer on the C64. Banana kicks, storms, replays and funky music and, of course, the mighty Oman – fantastic stuff.


ID: Gnome
Pirates! in all its map-reading glory and with its impressively stuffed box.

ID: batman877
UFO: Enemy Unknown on my trusty Amiga CD32! It was the next best thing since *Laser Squad*...



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13 issue subscription (UK) – £51.90 ■ 13 issue subscription (Europe) £70
■ 13 issue subscription (Overseas) – £80

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Printed by
St Ives Andover, West Portway, Andover, SP10 3SF
Retro Gamer is distributed by Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT ☎ 0207 4294000

ISSN 1742-3155





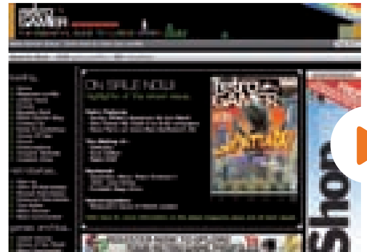


BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier, as all you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Stuart has been building up his Dreamcast shmup collection.



Head on over to the excellent **retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php.



Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



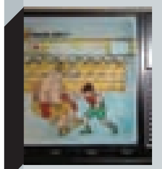
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

EBAY BARGAINS

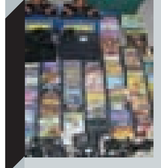
This issue we've decided to go Stateside to see what weird and wonderful things our US cousins are selling…



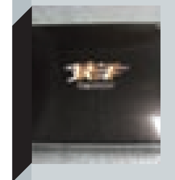
■ A must for any avid NES collector is this network system modem. You don't see very many of these around, and for a cool $80, too.



■ With *Punch-Out!!* coming to Wii next year, celebrate in style by treating your fridge to this cool holographic fridge magnet which was going for $4.99



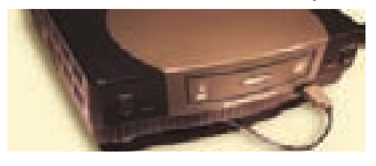
■ Stuart was on the hunt for TurboGrafx-16's 70+ games. It was lucky then when this one came up for auction recently – shame he's skint.



■ The most awesome Dreamcast on the planet is going for a cool $219.00 (or about £100). Not a bad price at all we reckon.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	**£45+ ($81+)**
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	**£40+ ($74+)**
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	**£20+ ($37+)**



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	**£30 ($55)**
ATOM	**£50 ($92)**
ACORN ELECTRON	**£10 ($18)**
BBC MICRO	**£15 ($28)**



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	**£10+ ($18+)**
CPC 664	**£90+ ($165+)**
CPC 6128	**£25+ ($46+)**
GX4000	**£50+ ($92+)**

APPLE

APPLE II	**£30+ ($55+)**

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	**£20+ ($37+)**
2600 (VCS)	**£20+ ($37+)**
5200	**£30 ($55)**
7800	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR CD	**£70 ($129)**
LYNX I/II	**£20+ ($37+)**
ST	**£20+ ($37+)**

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	**£75+ ($138+)**
PLAYDIA	**£90 ($166)**
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	**£500+ ($921+)**
WONDERSWAN	**£10 ($18)**
WONDERSWAN COLOR	**£20 ($37)**
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	**£25 ($46)**



COMMODORE

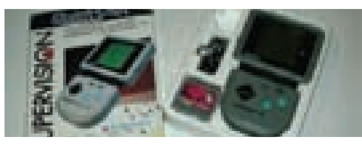
AMIGA 500/600/1200	**£20+ ($37+)**
C16/PLUS/4	**£15+ ($28+)**
C64	**£10+ ($18+)**
C64 GS	**£30+ ($55+)**
C128	**£30+ ($55+)**
CDTV	**£20 ($37)**
CD32	**£25 ($46)**
VIC-20	**£10+ ($18+)**

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	**£100+ ($184+)**
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	**£200+ ($368+)**



MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE	**£20 ($37)**
BARCODE BATTLER	**£5 ($18)**
CASIO LOOPY	**£25 ($46)**
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	**£10 ($18)**
COLECOVISION	**£30 ($55**
DRAGON 32/64	**£8 ($15)**
ARCADIA 2001	**£10 ($18)**
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	**£20 ($37)**
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	**£30 ($55)**
INTELLIVISION	**£40+ ($74+)**
ODYSSEY	**£10 ($18)**
ORIC-1	**£20 ($37)**
PLAYSTATION	**£10 ($18)**
SAM COUPÉ	**£50 - £200 ($92 - $368)**
SUPERVISION	**£15 ($28)**
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	**£15 ($28)**
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	**£10 ($18)**
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	**£80 ($147)**
X68000	**£90+ ($166+)**

MSX

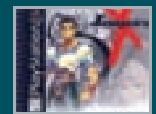
MSX 1	**£10+ ($18+)**
MSX 2	**£20+ ($37+)**
MSX 2+	**£30+ ($55+)**
MSX TURBO R	**£30+ ($55+)**

NEC

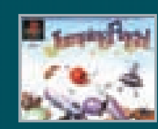
PC-6###	**£10+ ($18+)**

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

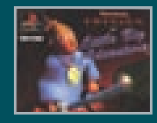
Retro Gamer will be sifting through pages of eBay and reporting back on any items of interest (hardware or software) that have caught our eyes. This month we've been seeking out PSone games…



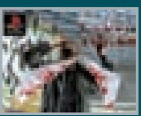
XENOGEARS
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£24**
Ended at **£24.67**



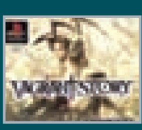
JUMPING FLASH!
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£2.70**



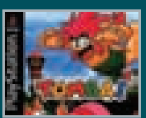
LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£18.20**



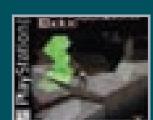
CLOCK TOWER
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£28**
Ended at **£32**



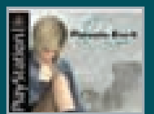
VAGRANT STORY
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£28.54**



TOMBA!
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£62**



IQ INTELLIGENT QUBE (IMPORT)
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£12.00**
Ended at **£14.67**



PARASITE EVE II
System: **PSone**
Normally sells for **£14**
Ended at **£19.40**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**
AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH WE SPEAK TO JASON DVORAK. JASON OWNS EVERY SINGLE PLAYSTATION GAME EVER MADE (NOW THAT'S AN AWFUL LOT OF FRAGILE PLASTIC CASES)

» Hi there, I'm Jason Dvorak, a 31 year old from Chicago, where I work as a videogame store assistant manager.

» I have at least one of every game's release – 1,280-ish. Add in all the variants and there's another 150 or so. Add in the LightSpan education games, which were licensed by Sony, and that's another 150. Finally add in all the demo discs, and we're looking at over 1,700 individual game pieces.

» The rarest item I have isn't even a game; it's actually a demo. *NBA 2 Ball* was given away at the 1998 NBA All-Star Game and only two copies exist.

» My luckiest finds come from me finding one thing while looking for something else. I once got a rare *Syphon Filter 3* variant by bringing it up in conversation.

» The first PSone game I bought was Capcom's *Street Fighter Alpha: Warriors' Dreams*. The last game I bought that completed the library was *Spyro: Collectors' Edition* three-pack.

If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1985

R B

JANUARY 1985 – C5 alive, Sinclair has a Curry, all out computer price war, magazine massacres, The Fall Guy falls short, Currah gone and Ripley and the chest-bursting aliens are coming. Richard Burton has a gut feeling…

» Acorn's Electron price plummeted to keep it competitive – not unlike the company's share price.

Commodore had problems. Reports that its newest machines, the C16 and Plus/4 were suffering poor sales and that there was also a lack of software support, were causing concern for the company.

With Commodore about to put its marketing weight behind the new C128, due for an official release in the summer, the future of the two lower-level machines looked to be distinctly vulnerable.

Large retailers stated that both machines were selling slowly with the Plus/4 being singled out as being the worst of the two. Even the much-maligned Sinclair QL was shifting more units than the woeful Plus/4.

Sinclair Vehicles officially launched the C5, the first in a proposed range of small electric vehicles, at Alexandra Palace on 10 January. Priced at £399, the battery-powered vehicle was hoped to kick-start a new eco-friendly, pollution-free way of transportation.

Unfortunately for Sinclair, the well-meaning idea proved to be a disaster, with Sir Clive eventually having to sell his company to Amstrad, such was the impact of the financial woes the C5 inflicted. However, there was good news with the C5 getting its own brand new magazine – *C5 Driver*. So that's all right then…



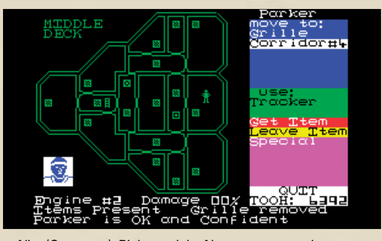
» The C5 had its own magazine. Not to be read of course, but to keep flies out of your face while pedalling up hills.

It may have been only a couple of weeks since Sir Clive of Sinclair and Chris Curry of Acorn decided to trade insults in The Baron of Beef (that's a pub, not a porno), when Sir Clive slapped Mr Curry around the bonce with a rolled-up newspaper resulting in much scuffling and twisting of silk ties. Well, round two was about to commence and the public would be judging the outcome with their cash.

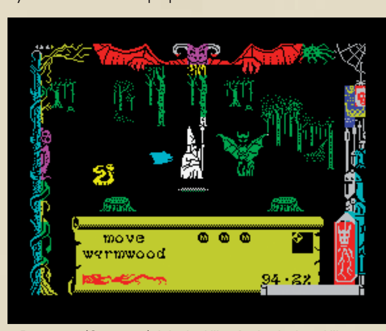
Sinclair's newly introduced Spectrum+ had already seen its price reduced, maybe due to the C5 situation, with it dropping to a competitive £129.95.

Within the week Acorn had also reduced the Electron's price from £199 to £129. Coincidence? Well, Acorn had also suffered financially with poor Christmas sales and a plummeting company share price. Aligning its price with that of the Spectrum+ was seen as a necessity rather than a marketing ploy.

The very average MSX range of computers also underwent a price cut with Mitsubishi knocking £25 off its machines. Although it stated that this was to remain competitive with other comparative systems, it was no secret to the home-computing market the MSX systems were unpopular in the UK.



» *Alien* (Spectrum): Ripley and the Nostromo crew take on a terrifying unstable creature – the Spectrum power supply.



» *Dragontorc* (Spectrum): It looked like *Avalon*, it played like *Avalon* – could it be the sequel to *Avalon*? Could be…



» *Skool Daze* (Spectrum): School's never been so much fun. 500 lines? I mustn't light magnesium strips in science class…

Currah, well known for its add-ons for the Spectrum and C64, went into receivership at the start of the year. Thankfully, the Currah name would live on through rival peripheral producer, dk'tronics, who bought the rights to the name and all products in the Currah range.

Argus Press announced that its magazine *Games Computing* would cease production in March. Essentially a collection of type-ins and adverts, the magazine was short-lived lasting just 15 issues. It never really took off and even today, is not widely heard of.

Another mag about to bite the dust was *TV Gamer*, which published its last standalone issue this month. The mag covered a bit of everything but never really hit the mark the way early issues of *C&VG* did. It later merged with *Big K* for two more issues before that also ceased publication after just 12 issues.

There were more casualties in the great magazine massacre with *Personal Computer Games* admitting its current issue would be its penultimate and *Micro Adventurer* stating it would be wound up after three more issues.

Argus Press had better news with the impending release of *Alien*, a game based on



» *Cliff Hanger* (C64): A marvellous game reminiscent of the *Road Runner* cartoon. Rubbish graphics, awesome game.

1985

JANUARY NEWS

16 January saw the highly informative and educational magazine *Playboy*, announce it would stop using staples in its magazines as they were ruining the artistic qualities of the centrefold pictures.

VH-1, a new music TV channel, was launched on 1 January. It complemented its hugely successful sister channel, MTV, with non-stop music videos for a more discerning audience. The first track played was *The Star Spangled Banner* by Marvin Gaye.

On 23 January the first televised debate from inside the House of Lords was screened. The first debate was initiated by Lord Portly of Rawlinson End into whether KP Griddles should be given shelf space in the Lord's tuck shop. Miraculously, even some of the Lords themselves managed to stay awake during the proceedings.



» The **RG** edition of *Playtoy* featured various computers in compromising positions…

On 28 January one of the cheesiest, yet good-hearted, musical events took place when the US equivalent of Band Aid, USA For Africa, recorded *We Are The World*.

Written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie and produced by Quincy Jones, the charitable affair for famine relief in Ethiopia was a huge hit and involved a megastar line-up including the likes of Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, Diana Ross, Billy Joel, Stevie Wonder and Bruce Springsteen.

» *We Are The World* by USA For Africa was a chart topper worldwide and a money raiser extraordinaire.

» *Battle Through Time* (C64): A very acceptable rendition of the tried and tested *Moon Buggy* genre.

the movie, which was to be the first in its Mind Games series. These games would use the Personality Control System, which, reportedly, gave the games' characters a personality based on the events going on around them. Nostromo-based shenanigans would be coming to a Speccy and C64 within the month.

Elite Systems' recent game based on the TV series *The Fall Guy* belatedly discovered that Lee Majors wasn't a fan of turbo loaders. 5,000 copies of the Spectrum version had to be recalled when it was found the turbo loader was preventing the game from loading properly. The duff copies were withdrawn from sale and a turbo loaderless version hastily released.



» *Stonkers* (Spectrum): The best war game of 1984 according to *Crash*. Well, it's definitely not *Stonkers*… er… hang on…

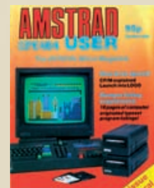
Hewson Consultants unveiled its follow-up game to the popular *Avalon*. *The Dragontorc Of Avalon*, labelled as a living adventure movie, was graphically identical to *Avalon*, as was the gameplay and spell-casting element of the game, albeit with some new spells. However, *Dragontorc* would still prove to be as big a hit as its predecessor and for all its similarities to *Avalon*, it was still a worthy game.

Crash revealed the results of its first annual Readers Awards for 1984. Among the winners were *Lords Of Midnight* (Beyond) for Best Graphical Adventure. Best War Game was *Stonkers* (Imagine), Best Overall Arcade Game went to *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* (Ocean) and the Bummer Of The Year went to *Kosmik Pirate* (Elephant Software). That's for the worst game of the year, in case you weren't sure…

C&VG stuck its Game Of The Month award onto *Ghostbusters* (Activision, C64). Other top-rated games were *Cliff Hanger* (New Generation, C64), *Pitfall* (Activision, C64), *Dodo Lair* (Software Projects, VIC-20), *Mr Ee!* (Micropower, BBC), *Jasper* (Micromega, Spectrum), *Knight Lore* (Ultimate, Spectrum), *Underwurlde* (Ultimate, Spectrum) and *Football Manager* (Addictive, Amstrad).

Big K cast an eye over *Erik The Viking* (Mosaic, Spectrum), *Sir Lancelot* (Melbourne House, Spectrum), *River Raid* (Activision, Spectrum), *Ad Infinitum* (Mr Chip, C64), *Battle Through Time* (Anirog, C64) with *Skool Daze* (Microsphere, Spectrum) getting extra brownie points for being its Pick Of The Month.

THIS MONTH IN…



AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER

ACU's first newsstand edition and the official Amstrad and Amsoft mag had 18 software reviews. Not bad you say… until you realise every title reviewed was an Amsoft release. Not only that, but its five-star ratings system saw every game, even the awful *Bridge-It*, get at least three stars.



MICRO ADVENTURER

The adventurers mag of choice took a long look at Beyond's sequel to *Lords Of Midnight*, the equally frustrating *Doomdark's Revenge*. With over six thousand locations and eight different directions to view them, that makes for a lot of scenes to wander… and a lot of yawning…





BIG K

Big K's newest feature was called Those We Have Lost, which looked back at the computers that tried hard to make it but, ultimately, were just a bit too rubbish. First up was the Jupiter Ace. It had virtually no software, a dead flesh feel keyboard and ran on Forth rather than BASIC. What were they thinking…?



CHARTS

JANUARY 1985

MUSIC

1. Do They Know It's Christmas (Band Aid)
2. Last Christmas (Wham!)
3. I Want To Know What Love Is (Foreigner)
4. Like A Virgin (Madonna)
5. Ghostbusters (Ray Parker Jnr)

SPECTRUM

1. Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Ocean)
2. Combat Lynx (Durell)
3. Underwurlde (Ultimate)
4. Pyjamarama! (Mikro-Gen)
5. Monty Mole (Gremlin Graphics)

COMMODORE 64

1. Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Ocean)
2. Chiller (Mastertronic)
3. Select Games One (Computer Records)
4. Beach Head (US Gold)
5. Jet Set Willy (Software Projects)

BBC

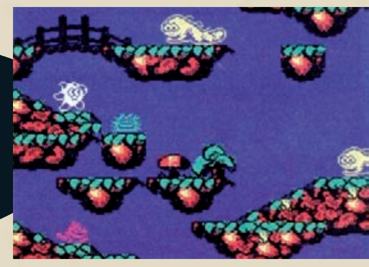
1. Elite (Acornsoft)
2. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
3. Pole Position (Atari)
4. Sabre Wulf (Ultimate)
5. Scrabble (Leisure Genius)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1991

APRIL 1991 – Monkey Island 2, Pit-Fighter, Spider fear and mouse wizardry from Disney, Spectrum Creatures dead, Betty Boo in Magic Pockets and it's no go for Snow Bros. Richard Burton stays away from the yellow snow…



» *Creatures* (Spectrum): Thalamus announced but failed to release several games, *Creatures* being one of them.



» *Fantasia* (Mega Drive): Mickey is back from the Castle Of Illusion for another outing. Nice graphics but let down by the gameplay.



» *Magic Pockets* (Atari ST): A good but not great platform game. At least Betty Boo gave us something to think about…

Lucasfilm revealed the news fans of Guybrush Ulysses Threepwood had been waiting for. It would be unveiling the sequel to its enormous hit *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, at the American CES Show in June. The wait for *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* was almost over…

MicroProse announced an updated version of its extremely popular *F-19 Stealth Fighter* game, which would feature more missions and enhanced graphics. The new game would be called *F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Fighter 2.0* and would be available on Amiga and Atari ST.

A conversion of the arcade game, *Pit-Fighter* was under development according to the Sega people. To be honest, you might want to keep that one a bit quiet. The Mega Drive version would feature the awful zoom in and out effect as well as the usual array of naff digitised characters. Rumour had it that it was even considering putting some gameplay into it, although that was strongly denied later… The Mega Drive version of *Pit-Fighter* would be available to soil your console some time in the coming autumn.

Disney revealed news of two interesting titles it had lined up for future release. The first was to be a game-of-the-film conversion of the Steven Spielberg hit movie *Arachnophobia*. The premise of the game is to wipe out the infestation of spiders that have set up camp in an American town. Presumably it would contain lots of hairiness and legs and great big pointy fangs. The game would be released on Amiga, PC, C64 and Amstrad.

The second offering was to be a follow-up to its highly successful and well-received game, *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*. *Fantasia* would follow Disney's remarkable movie and would contain much of the classical music played throughout the film. However, *Fantasia* and its dancing brooms would only be released on the Sega Mega Drive. Both titles were pencilled in for summer releases.

The often overlooked arcade game *Snow Bros*, was finally going to get the conversion treatment with news that Ocean, or at least the French arm of the company, was going to be doing the icy deed.

With plans for release on Atari ST and Amiga and with early indications showing it was looking to be very good and with some suitably cute and colourful screenshots to back it up, Ocean looked like it was on to a winner. The game was eventually completed… and never released.

The reason behind this seems to be that the notoriously tardy Ocean France was taking so long to get the game completed. Ocean UK pulled the plug on the project as it had spent so much time and money on marketing and advertising *Snow Bros* that it couldn't warrant spending an obscene amount of money to keep the marketing bandwagon rolling any further.

The game itself, now available after the original development disks were recovered, played rather well. The 2D platformer had hints of *Bubble Bobble* about it and was graphically excellent. The two-player option was sadly missing though and may well have impacted on potential sales, being an integral part of the arcade version. Had Ocean France, who also programmed *Toki* and *Pang*, pulled its fingers out a bit quicker we could've found out for ourselves.

Thalamus, creator of *Hawkeye* and *Quedex* on the C64, was on the verge of releasing



» *Pit-Fighter* (Mega Drive): What is that smell? Man, it whiffs almost as bad as *Rise Of The Robots*…



» *Pilotwings* (SNES): It managed to capture the sensation of flying really well, even down to the wind noise rushing past you.

» *Nighthawk F-117A: Stealth Fighter 2.0* (Amiga): The follow-up to the *F-19 Stealth Fighter* game and a superb flight sim.

1991

APRIL NEWS

On 29 April a devastating tropical cyclone hit the Chittagong region of Bangladesh. Its winds were measured at 155mph and 20-foot storm surges rushed inland. In total 138,000 people were killed and around 10 million were left homeless.

On 14 April art thieves stole 20 paintings worth an estimated $500 million from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. All the artworks were later recovered within an hour of the robbery.

» Maradona thanks his fans after he successfully auditions for the part of Hurley in the Argentine version of the hit TV series *Lost*.

On 6 April Argentine footballer Diego Maradona was suspended from the Italian football league after testing positive for cocaine. He was later banned from world football for 15 months and returned to former club Boca Juniors to stay fit.

Unfortunately, on 26 April he was arrested in Buenos Aires for possession and trafficking of drugs and he received a 12-month suspended sentence. He got himself together and made a comeback at the 1994 World Cup. Mid-tournament he again failed a drugs test, this time testing positive for five banned stimulants – meat pies, beef dripping, Bovril, coffee and lard. There was no coming back from lard…



» Recovered from a car after the Dutch art heist, Boris Kalinin's painting of the Miners From Rapa Nui. Nice.



» *Monkey Island 2* (PC): One of the best point-and-click adventures ever? You don't see us arguing…



» *Snow Bros* (Amiga): It looked like it was going to be a great conversion but never got to see a commercial release.

Creatures, another cracking C64 game, on the Spectrum. The chance to save your fellow Fuzzy Wuzzies was just a couple of short months away when, once again, the game was pulled for no apparent reason. Unlike Ocean's *Snow Bros*, the development materials for *Creatures* are still missing…

And there was yet further developmental mysteriousness with another game disappearing. The strange and twisted world of *Twin Peaks*, the cult TV series, was to be transformed into a NES game. The proposed adventure puzzler would no doubt have been mondo bizarre and unfathomably difficult but, once again, nothing ever appeared. Should we have expected anything less from a game connected to the *Twin Peaks* universe?

The Bitmap Brothers' forthcoming platform game *Magic Pockets*, would have the added spice of having the in-game tune supplied by the musical girl of the moment, Betty Boo. A remix of *Doin' The Do* would feature and the game itself should be finished and on sale in the autumn for the Amiga and Atari ST. The Bitmaps do Betty Boo… man, is it me or is it getting warm in here?

Tightwad gamers of the world united with unrestrained happiness with Mirrorsoft's announcement of a new budget label, cunningly titled Mirror Image. The games, for Amiga, ST and PC, would be £9.99 and the launch titles included some fine vintage games including Cinemaware titles *Defender Of The Crown* and *Rocket Ranger*.

The One magazine reached its final issue this month, at least as a multiformat affair. From next month, *The One* would become two, when it would be split into two individual publications, an Amiga and Atari ST edition. Although *The One* regularly catered for PC gaming, there would be no separate edition for PC gamers who were left to fend for themselves.

The *C&VG* reviewers bestowed C&VG Hit status upon *Midwinter II* (Rainbird, Atari ST), *S.W.I.V.* (Storm, Amiga/C64), *Last Ninja 3* (System 3, C64), *Gynoug* (Masiya, Mega Drive), *Pilotwings* (Nintendo, Super Nintendo) and *Red Baron* (Dynamix, PC).

Meanwhile, *Computer & Video Games*' sister magazine, *Mean Machines*, dished out its Mega Game awards to *PGA Tour Golf* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *ActRaiser* (Enix, Super Nintendo) and *R-Type* (Sega, Master System).

Raze was presenting its Raze Raves badge of honour to *Shanghai* (Mediagenic/Atari, Atari Lynx), *Phantasy Star II* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Countdown* (US Gold/Access, PC) and *Links* (US Gold/Access, PC).

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

ACE



ACE featured a new concept in gaming, the Actual Reality Sensory Environment. The graphics were so realistic you would swear blind they were real. The AR headset was in its prototype stage – a circuit board taped to a pair of NHS specs. Unfortunately the A.R.S.E. system never reached retailers. Shame.



THE ONE

The One reviewed *Brat* and gave it 93%. It did have great graphics and gameplay inspired by *Lemmings* but also a very irritating baby character. It was also let down by having to restart each level after losing a life, even if you were within a wet-wipe's width of finishing the level. Blub.



C&VG



Pac-Mania arrived and although it didn't get a C&VG Hit, the Master System version fared very well for a reworking of the classic game. Granted, it was more of the same with the added bonus of Pac-Man having jumping abilities and some very nice forced perspective. Wacka wacka indeed.



APRIL 1991

AMIGA

1 Lemmings (Psygnosis)
2 Speedball 2 (Mirrorsoft)
3 A-10 Tank Killer (Sierra/Dynamix)
4 F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse)
5 Chaos Strikes Back (Mirrorsoft)

ATARI ST

1 Speedball 2 (Mirrorsoft)
2 Legend Of Faerghail (Rainbow Arts)
3 F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse)
4 M1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse)
5 MiG-29 (Domark)

PC

1 Wing Commander (Mindscape)
2 F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse)
3 A-10 Tank Killer (Sierra/Dynamix)
4 Silent Service II (MicroProse)
5 MiG-29 (Domark)

MUSIC

1 The One And Only (Chesney Hawkes)
2 Sit Down (James)
3 The Shoop Shoop Song (Cher)
4 The Whole Of The Moon (Waterboys)
5 Rescue Me (Madonna)



02

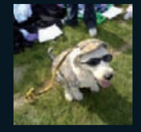


GUNFRIGHT

RIDE 'EM COWBOY



- » **PUBLISHER:** ULTIMATE
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £6+



HISTORY

Games by Ultimate are being snapped up like hot cakes [on Retro Gamer's website] so I just had to put this classy release up before anyone else did.

You play the well-named Sheriff Quickdraw, and your job is to rid the Wild West town of Blackrock of all its gunfighter baddies. The people in Blackrock are not too keen on these gunfighters and are happy to point you in their general direction. In fact, sometimes they'll point in several directions, which can confuse the player. Sheriff Quickdraw has a trusty horse called Panto (play the game and you'll understand why he has that name), who needs to be found first, but can get you around Blackrock much quicker than on foot. When you find a baddie, you have to first shoot them, then go into a shoot-out against them. If you win, you get a cash reward.

Money is important in *Gunfright*. In the first stage you have to shoot bags of money and doing well here is important to your game. Ammo for your pistol costs money, Panto the horse costs money and if you run over innocent townsfolk on Panto, you've guessed it, it costs money, you get fined. So all that cash is really useful.

Gunfright's only real flaw for me is its difficulty, as it's so easy to lose a life. If you bump into townsfolk on foot, you lose a life. Hit a cactus, you lose a life. More obviously, you lose a life if you get shot. So, I always found the game really difficult. In fact, I don't think I ever found any more than three gunfighters (I have vague memories of some of the gunfighters being on horses and chasing after them on Panto).

Gunfright has Ultimate's trademark monochrome 3D look, and some would say that perhaps it's a little too similar to other Ultimate releases like *Nightshade*. It plays very well (when you're alive) and has reasonable enough sound effects, but I recommend you play this game on a joystick – it's tough enough as it is.

All in all, I think this is a top-class Ultimate game. Very difficult, but like all its games, it oozes quality. Not Ultimate's most famous release I know, but please don't ignore it.

Want to appear in the magazine? Then be sure to upload classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

RETROBATE PROFILE

- **NAME:** CRISPIAN DRIVER
- **JOINED:** 15 AUG 2008
- **LOCATION:** COLCHESTER
- **OCCUPATION:** MACHINE OPERATOR
- **FAV GAMES SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **BIO:** I LOVE GAMES NEW AND OLD, CURRENTLY ENJOYING MY 360, BUT ALSO LOVE RETRO GAMES ON VARIOUS PLATFORMS





RED MOON BECAME THE INSPIRATION FOR ONE OF OLIVER FREY'S GREATEST CRASH COVERS.

TODD VISITS SOME WORLD ON THE MEGA DRIVE

SCAPEGHOST IS A DETECTIVE STORY WITH A DIFFERENCE AND IS DEFINITELY WORTH PLAYING THROUGH.

COMPILATIONS TURNED OUT TO BE AN INEXPENSIVE WAY OF DISCOVERING SOME OF LEVEL 9'S BEST GAMES.



LEVEL 9

Paul Rigby takes a look back at the life and times of family-run developer Level 9, one of the most highly regarded creators of text adventures in the UK…



» The 'Oops' command was a great way of redoing bad moves and went on to appear in many Level 9 titles.

The text adventure was a tough genre to crack successfully. It required you to stuff next to no RAM with an advanced AI, an able and comprehensible parser that could communicate successfully and sensibly, and design a world that, no matter how bizarre the subject matter, made sense. Never mind that you had to think up new and more devilish puzzles, create a storyline, be able to string a whole sentence together (sometimes with words of more than one syllable) and, saints preserve us, actually be entertaining into the bargain. Is it any wonder that so many individuals and companies tried and failed to deliver the goods? Text adventure history is spotted, strewn and sprinkled with brave attempts and magnificent failures. It was, therefore, a minor miracle to find one software development team who not only managed to produce great games, but did so with consistency – Level 9.

Often seen as the British version of that other great adventure software house, America's Infocom, partly because of its extensive catalogue, innovative approach to design and complex puzzles, Level 9, in fact, began life selling a language, BASIC, based upon a rather 'basic' computer – the Nascom – the UK's most successful kit computer. Level 9 went on to create a compression assembler called Compass for the Nascom and then diversified into games. It created its own take on the classic arcade blaster *Asteroids*, plus *Fantasy*, a title which resembled the popular Spectrum release *Valhalla*. The programming wizard behind the company, Pete Austin, in an interview with *Sinclair User*, described *Fantasy*. "There were a lot of characters wandering around who changed according to your actions," he said. "What I did was to make it print out in proper English. I'm interested in the user interface, what used to be called front-end programming."

Pete, a Cambridge psychology graduate, was only one part of the family business that was Level 9. Sharing programming duties were brothers Nicholas, who studied computer science at London University, and Michael, who read engineering at Southampton University and would later create an entire programming language that would power Pete's own adventure writing system, called A-code. Fronting the company was sister Margaret, who handled all of Level 9's marketing activities, while their father, John Austin, would later become Level 9's managing director.

While working with the mainframe manufacturer, Perkin-Elmer, it was Pete's long-term interest in tabletop gaming in the fields of both wargaming and Dungeons & Dragons, that made him sit up when he stumbled across a strange game created by two Americans named Crowther and Woods. Called *Adventure*, it was to dominate Pete's lunch hours. "There had been a number of simpler games on the computer at Cambridge, based on the D&D format," he says. "*Adventure* was full of puzzles, many of which were extremely unfair. I cracked it in two weeks."

Which is pretty good going, as most people were taking months to complete the program, which was to go down in history as the very first text adventure. The original mainframe *Adventure* consisted of 70 locations and spanned 200K, a hefty amount of code in those days. It makes the subsequent creation of *Colossal Adventure* (1983), Level 9's first 'proper' text adventure based upon the original *Adventure* code, expanded by 70 locations and squeezed into just 32K, a real marvel for its time.

One of the reasons for the efficiency of the code itself is Pete's own text compression program, a piece of code that was used for all of Level 9's subsequent adventures. Here's how it worked. Imagine that you've got a word ending in 'ing' – read any piece of text and you will see those three letters pop up pretty frequently. Pete's compressor would replace those three letters with a single piece of code. Immediately, you've shrunk the location description. Then, repeat for other frequent words and the size of that text begins to shrink further. Later, Pete would adapt the text compressor so that he could store a large amount of graphics. Using the same system of replacing frequently used bits of images with a single code, Pete was able

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When you think about it, the Level 9 moniker is an odd name to give a company and, on the face of it, appears to be full of numerical meaning. So where did it come from? "Levels are the sort of things you come across a lot in dungeons," mused Pete. As for the numerical addition? Chance, it seemed, played a major part, "…it's useful to have a number in the title. For one thing, you can slip adverts in your own games. You'd be surprised at the number of times nines turn up in our adventures."









Scapeghost

SCAPEGHOST ALLOWED YOU TO PLAY AS A GHOSTLY DETECTIVE AND SAW YOU TRYING TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER.





"ADVENTURE QUEST BECAME THE FIRST TRUE ADVENTURE GAME TO BE INDEPENDENTLY PRODUCED BY THE COMPANY"

IN BRIEF

Spawned from the fire that was the original Crowther and Woods mainframe version of *Adventure* – the first ever text adventure – Level 9, a family-run business that featured a coding team of three brothers, rose to become a major force in UK text adventures. Creating some of the most sophisticated game engine routines in the world, Level 9 ultimately produced some of the most advanced text adventures for the 8-bit computer and would also push the boundaries for character-driven puzzles. The company produced 20 games including a number of extraneous games based on popular brands.

to squeeze a location image into just 30 bytes.

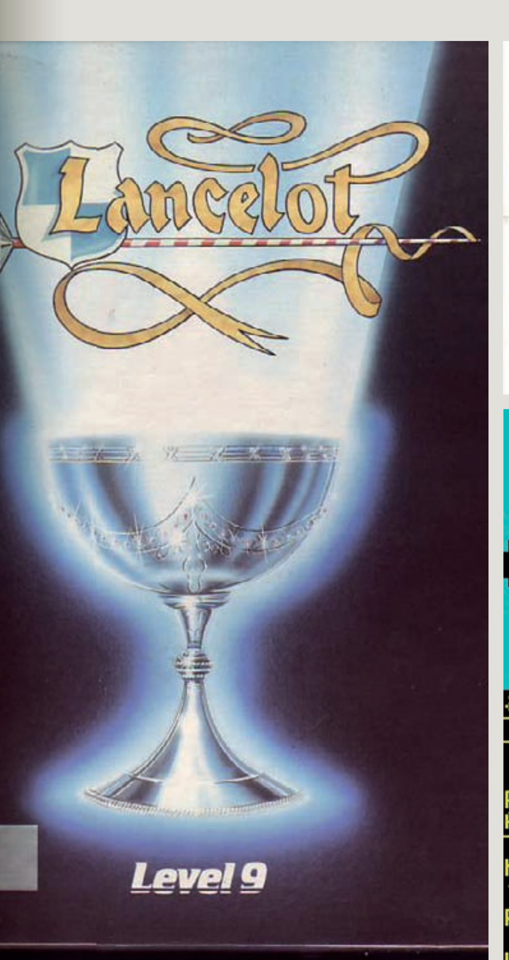
It is possible that the hard work that the brothers invested in the early days of their development extended the life of the company itself, if not allowed them to retain their place as an independent company. Andrew Deeley, who coded for Level 9, recalls that, "…with so many 8-bit computers on the market and the [later] introduction of Macs, Amigas and Atari STs, developing for cross-platform versions of a game was becoming prohibitive in costs back in the late-Eighties and early-Nineties. Level 9 was able to hold its own as a small developer because it was able to optimise cross platform." And what a list of 'platforms' they were. Level 9 games appeared on the Sinclair Spectrum, Commodore 64, BBC B, Enterprise 64, Memotech MTX-512, Nascom, Nimbus, Oric 48K, Spectravideo 328, MSX, Amiga, Atari ST, PC, Amstrad PCW and Amstrad CPC.

Because of the multi-platform approach to its games, Level 9 found opportunities to modify and enhance its creations in both technological terms but also regarding packaging. Before the more familiar boxed versions, the initial incarnation of *Colossal Adventure* arrived in a resealable plastic bag plus a manual and a card which, if you were stuck, you could write to Level 9 and request a clue. This area was initially handled by Pete until the trickle of clue requests became a flood and Pete found that it was taking over his entire working day, leaving no time to actually develop new games. This unfortunate side effect to the increase in the popularity of Level 9's games led to the development of a more extensive, all-inclusive clue sheet.

The creation of the company's second game was a milestone. The Austin brothers found themselves full of both excitement and trepidation, as *Adventure Quest* (1983) became the first true adventure game to be independently produced by the company. Following a relatively standard pattern, the design of *Adventure Quest* took around two months to complete with a further two months to programme and a final two months to generate the computer tapes, packaging and the like. Taking a similar Middle Earth-like theme to *Colossal Adventure*, *Adventure Quest* was a sleeper. Reportedly suffering from low sales, initially, the game steadily grew in stature and reputation for both its entertaining problems and in-game atmosphere.

That atmosphere continued with the third release. A game that would eventually become the final part in a fantasy trilogy later to be boxed as a compilation called *Jewels Of Darkness* (1986). *Dungeon Adventure* (1983) continued the Middle Earth theme and introduced a magic system seemingly derived from the popular tabletop role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons. Featuring over 100 different puzzles, this traditional adventure – basically, a treasure-hunting exercise – has gained a reputation for being tough, yet tremendously entertaining.

Having, apparently overdosed on fantasy elements, the Austin brothers shifted their focus towards sci-fi and the first of what would become a new trilogy. In *Snowball* (1983), you awake from a deep-freeze sleep on a transport ship, apparently hurtling towards a star and certain death. But



Snowball was a controversial game. Despite receiving universal praise from initial reviews, many did see its marketing as a con. Boasting 7,000 locations, the game only provided 200 of any note plus 6,800 in the form of a maze. That said, the game did show progress with lengthy responses to the 'Exam' command. This game also consciously addressed sexism, referring to the principle character as Kim to give a purposefully androgynous slant to the hero (or, indeed, heroine).

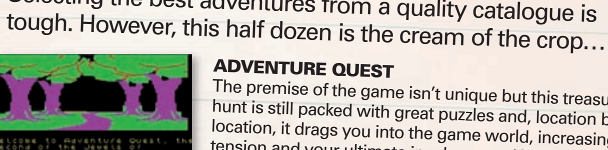
Level 9's second sci-fi adventure title, *Return To Eden* (1984) provided a breakthrough as the accompanying magazine advertisements declared this title to be Level 9's first, full-colour text/graphics adventure – a move that appeared to have been a result of retail pressure more than by a necessity of design. Graphic quality was poor, however. Basic and lacking in imagination, this 'feature' looked what it was – an afterthought. The game itself, however, was interesting. "It's an alien theme park gone wild," says Pete. "The Eden universe is more like [sci-fi author, Larry] Niven's future space." And, about the plot, he says: "*Return To Eden* is intended as a comment on superpower intervention in the Third World."

The final game in the science-fiction sequence was the *Worm In Paradise* (1985) (later forming the final part in the *Silicon Dreams* trilogy), which continued the Austin brother's socially aware plotting, concentrating on a society stifled by bureaucracy, controlled by robots who treat the occupying humans like pets. The puzzles remained involved and often difficult but, technically, the improvements continued with an enhanced, full sentence parser.

Acting as a sort of 'breather' and standing alone as an adventure title, *Emerald Isle* (1985) found you parachuted onto an island in which you stumble on to a lost civilisation. Level 9 intended this game to be a 'quickie' with a slightly lower than normal difficulty level – but that is a matter of opinion! While an enjoyable adventure, *Emerald Isle* illustrated that, despite – or maybe because of – the vast complexity of the Level 9 game world, there were always glitches in the system. For example, if you submerged yourself in water and then typed 'Drink water', you would be told 'You can't see any water'.

Before the launch of the next major trilogy, Level 9 dived into the depths of commerciality with three games based upon varyingly successful brands. Arcade games were used to this sort of thing, of course. New *Batman* film on the way? So is the new *Batman* game. In the more studious and refined atmosphere that was the text-adventure market, however, this sort of crudity was still permeating through the hallowed halls of literary endeavour. Even so, when the

Nick and Pete Austin, space pioneers



LEVEL UP

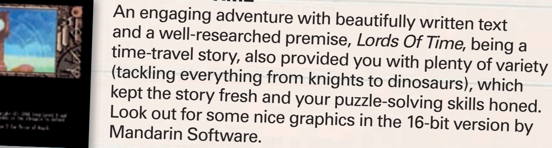
Selecting the best adventures from a quality catalogue is tough. However, this half dozen is the cream of the crop…

ADVENTURE QUEST
The premise of the game isn't unique but this treasure hunt is still packed with great puzzles and, location by location, it drags you into the game world, increasing the tension and your ultimate involvement. With over 200 locations, *Adventure Quest* is arguably the best of the initial *Jewels Of Darkness* fantasy trilogy.

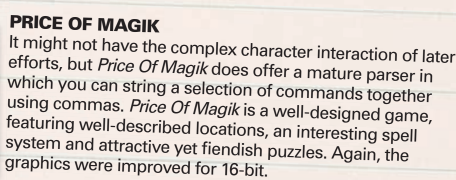


RED MOON
With a host of features including an excellent 'type ahead' option that keeps the gameplay ticking over nicely with interesting 'magik' and combat routines, where this game really shines is in its imaginative storyline. As *Red Moon* unfolds it becomes clear a great deal of thought has gone into its construction. *Red Moon* is computer adventuring at its best.

RETURN TO EDEN
The sequel to *Snowball*, this sci-fi-based adventure is filled with great puzzles and a real sense of pace. In fact, like the beginning of *Snowball*, from the start, the tension dial is rammed to ten as you are placed in a perilous situation right from the off with tasks to do immediately to prevent your imminent demise.



LORDS OF TIME
An engaging adventure with beautifully written text and a well-researched premise, *Lords Of Time*, being a time-travel story, also provided you with plenty of variety (tackling everything from knights to dinosaurs), which kept the story fresh and your puzzle-solving skills honed. Look out for some nice graphics in the 16-bit version by Mandarin Software.



PRICE OF MAGIK
It might not have the complex character interaction of later efforts, but *Price Of Magik* does offer a mature parser in which you can string a selection of commands together using commas. *Price Of Magik* is a well-designed game, featuring well-described locations, an interesting spell system and attractive yet fiendish puzzles. Again, the graphics were improved for 16-bit.



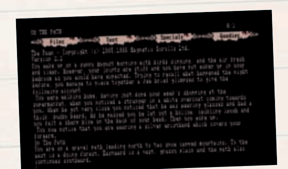
INGRID'S BACK
Full of fun with some improved writing and better quality jokes than its prequel, *Gnome Ranger*, this game saw a more mature version of the KAOS game engine with enhanced game characters, plus a more sensible implementation of complex commands such as 'Follow' and 'Find'. Not the hardest Level 9 adventure game but one of the most pleasurable.



SCAPEGHOST
A game by which Level 9 cocked its hat and rode off into the sunset. The final adventure game the company ever produced, providing the most refined example of the KAOS game engine, supplying complex puzzles, offering you the best graphics the company ever produced and, most of all, serving up a literary treat that set an atmospheric ambience.

INFLUENCES

Level 9 influenced the adventure market in many respects. Arguably, the following games reflected the company's prowess…



THE PAWN – MAGNETIC SCROLLS
For a time, Magnetic Scrolls was a label mate of Level 9 under the Rainbird banner. *The Pawn* was the first adventure released by this UK outfit. Initially aimed at the 16-bit market, *The Pawn* was hailed for its quality graphics, with even computers such as the C64 looking sleek and sexy – until another look led to an appreciation of the literary aspects of the title.



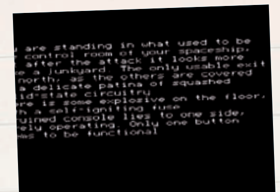
LORD OF THE RINGS – MELBOURNE HOUSE
Offering a freedom of play that provided a great deal of movement but also left the gamer feeling a little confused about what to do, this title, nevertheless, was based on an advanced game engine called Inglish and provided a mighty story to push the game along. A selection of bugs and slow gameplay did try the patience but it was a brave design.



HOMEBREW – VARIOUS
Don't recall *Homebrew* on the Various label? Actually we refer to the array of home-made adventure titles developed over the country via popular third-party utilities such as The Quill, PAW and GAC. They led to a gamut of privately published games that were often reviewed in the glossy magazines. While some of the releases suffered from various defects, varying in quality, others surprised by reaching creative highs.



THE BIG SLEAZE – DELTA 4
Delta 4 was a developer big on humour and on sending up respectable productions such as *The Hobbit* ('*The Boggit*') and *The Lord Of The Rings* ('*Bored Of The Rings*'), plus unique productions such as *The Colour Of Magic*, taken from the related Terry Pratchett book. This game, based on the noir film *The Big Sleep*, addresses the sleazy private-eye world of Sam Spillade. Laughs aplenty via quality gameplay.



THE DOOM TRILOGY – TOPOLOGIKA
Tolpologika produced adventures for the hardcore adventure gamer, presenting tough puzzles with a strictly text-only interface. Based on a science-fiction premise, the trilogy of related titles consisted of *Doom* (which was initially released and then, later, rewritten and expanded by about 50 per cent), *Return To Doom* and *Last Days Of Doom*. The trilogy of games were a worthy challenge for hardcore gamers.





The House of the Red Moon is a weird place, haunted by arcane powers from the mythical past. It is the only place where one might rise from Sorcerer's Apprentice to powerful Wizard, yet cheat the Price of Magik.
The Price of Magik is the sequel to "Adventure of Year 1985", Red Moon.
ADVENTURE FEATURES (see inside cover for more details):
- ENGLISH COMMANDS. Type almost anything you want, using full sentences, abbreviations or even several sentences on a line. The Price of Magik understands a wider range of English than any other tape game we've seen.
- INDEPENDENT CREATURES FOR YOU TO COMMAND, making use of their special skills. Creatures have lives and wills of their own, and can be given sophisticated orders.
- MANY POWERFUL SPELLS to learn and use.
- 1000 WORD VOCABULARY in most versions.
- OVER 200 LOCATIONS, ALL ILLUSTRATED (not BBC).
- MASSES OF TEXT (using our state-of-the-art squasher).
- MULTI-TASKING so you needn't wait while pictures draw.
- HONEST ADVERTISING, INVENTIVE PUZZLES, FAST RESPONSE, NO HOBBITS AND VERY FEW BUGS.

REVIEWS OF LEVEL 9 COMPUTING:

The Price of Magik

Level 9 Computing



Join the nationwide quest to find the Holy Grail – worth £5,000!

company eventually did take the mercantile move, it chose suitably quirky targets: Radio 4's legendary soap opera *The Archers* (1985), author Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾* (1985) and its sequel *The Growing Pains Of Adrian Mole* (1987), and, finally, *The Saga Of Erik The Viking* (1985), based on a book written by ex-Monty Python man Terry Jones.

All except *The Saga Of Erik* temporarily dumped the complex parser for a multiple-choice-based system that formed a decision tree leading you into right or wrong decisions. A novelty, at the time, the system imposed strict boundaries of gameplay freedom and, while they were generally well reviewed, they are seen, by Level 9 fans, as aberrations rather than as part of the Level 9 adventure 'canon'. *Erik*, on the other hand, is based on the classic adventure style, which is both entertaining and, knowing Jones for his love of history, educational, too. It is also not a straight rip-off of the book but a story extension – a nice touch.

Science fiction was tweaked in *Lords Of Time* (1983), a time-travelling caper that became the first entry in the next trilogy, that later became known as *Time And Magik* (1988). This game reported progress of a different hue, as it was the first Level 9 title not to be designed by the brothers. The game's designer Sue Gazzard, a dedicated adventure fan, was writing programs for Level 9 just three months after buying her first BBC computer. "I've been known to stay up till 2am. I found adventures fired my imagination," she told *Micro Adventurer*. Sue took the design of *Lords Of Time* very seriously, burying herself in the library during the design stage, "so, a Roman village is based on a map of a real village and a Tudor house is a copy of a real house."

The trilogy was completed by two excellent titles, which returned to the fantasy theme: *Red Moon* (1985) and *The Price Of Magik* (1986) (the company's final 8-bit-only title). *Red Moon*, featuring over 200 locations, retained the company's high design standards and offered the player a purely magical theme combining a standard adventure design with a combat system based on hit points. The task was to seek out the Red Moon crystal, the source of all magic. Gameplay involved accumulating 12 spells and nine (there's that number again) pieces of treasure. For the 8-bit versions, the developed parser successfully supported the graphic engine. So, even though the graphics loaded comparatively quickly, you could speed up play further by typing in your next command as the new picture drew itself on screen.

These titles showed the ongoing fight between the desire to produce literary texts and the market demands for graphics, which continued to be the Achilles heel of the company's products. For example, for the Spectrum 48K tape version, one side of the tape loaded the graphic version of the game and the other side offered the text-only version. Oddly, the latter proved to be the more desirable of the two, mainly because it provided more information, which often aided you in solving puzzles.

Addressing the newly burgeoning 16-bit market, featuring the Commodore Amiga, Atari ST and the PC, Level 9 decided that a break had to be made with its old 8-bit development system and its graphical direction. The result was KAOS, designed by John Jones-Steele (designer of *Colossal Adventure* and *Mordon's Quest* for Melbourne





GNOME RANGER APPEARED ON THE AMIGA, BUT WASN'T NEARLY AS SUCCESSFUL AS LEVEL 9'S EARLIER ADVENTURES.



MANY OF LEVEL 9'S LATER TITLES WERE PUBLISHED BY RAINBIRD.

"LEVEL 9 WAS RESTRICTED IN HOW MUCH MEMORY IT WAS ABLE TO PLAY WITH"

House), a grand, character-oriented and driven system that may have had its roots in Level 9's abortive attempt at producing a multi-user dungeon game called *Avalon*. The new game engine allowed you to give orders to characters in order to solve complex puzzles. Teaming up with Telecomsoft's Rainbird label, *Knight Orc* (1987) was born. Playing the role of an orc you had to escape from the repressive world you live in. The game was a great success being full of ambience with some genuinely funny textual situations. The new graphic style was divisive, however. Definitely an improvement, the updated, yet 'washed out' style was simultaneously loved and hated with a similar passion.

Humour and fantasy remained on the agenda with two games featuring Ingrid the Sloane Gnome. In *Gnome Ranger* (1987) and *Ingrid's Back* (1988), Level 9's first game for Mandarin Software, you play the part of Ingrid, experiencing her adventures after she's been kicked out of her village and later having to thwart a land developer to save that very same village. Utilising a modified KAOS system for *Ingrid's Back*, the wandering game characters were better controlled utilising a racetrack system and the locations, while few in number, were more detailed.

Lancelot (1988) plunged the gamer into the Arthurian legends in which you had to find the Grail but rescue a few knights and damsels in the process. Featuring a refined game engine, *Lancelot*'s gameplay depended on a variety of character-based puzzles and included a detailed world, in which just about everything can be examined.

The company's final game *Scapeghost* (1989), known for a time in development as *Spook*, sees you as an ex-undercover copper and ex-human. Playing a ghost, it's your task to clear your name as you're blamed for tipping off a drugs gang before they were snatched. A fitting finale to the Level 9 library, *Scapeghost* was well written, with suitably moody tones, plenty of puzzles that require lateral thinking and the best set of graphics the company had ever produced.

Level 9 ended its career dumping the adventure game genre entirely because of a perceived lack of interest and then moved into more graphical, action-oriented fare. However, it never found success and, during the early-Nineties, the team split and went their separate ways. A sad end to a great team who produced a superb series of adventure games.

Looking back over the company's history, whatever the benefits of the inherent coding system, it is true that Level 9 was hampered by the UK computer market because it was largely dominated by two tape-based 8-bit computers: the Spectrum and the C64 – in those early days, the C64's tape option was very popular in the UK. Consequently, Level 9 was severely restricted in how much memory it was able to play with. The American-based Infocom, Level 9's main competition, by contrast, based its coding system on the popular and more expensive disk systems supported by the Apple II, Commodore 64 and the Atari XL plus the early version of the PC. This meant that Infocom could produce games using a disk-based virtual memory arrangement, which extended the memory bounds enormously allowing the American company to build its own text library on a more literary foundation along with more fluid game designs. Any critic of a Level 9 game should bear those facts in mind. It is interesting to muse, however, that we probably never saw the best of the Level 9 team. Free from the tape-based stricture and blessed with a virtual disk system from the off, the Austin brothers may, with years of development in front of them, have produced similar, if not superior, works of art of the type often attributable to Infocom.

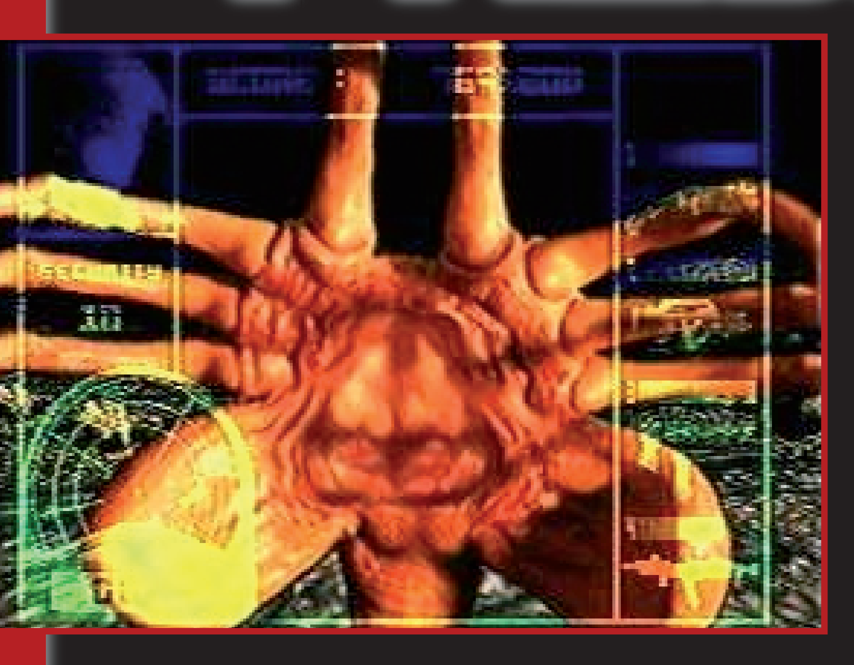
The UK-derived technical restrictions do, in fact, reflect more praise and glory on to the British outfit, who, at least in terms of compression techniques, was technically superior to its American neighbour. As such, Level 9 was, undoubtedly, responsible for the most technically advanced tape-based adventures the world had ever seen.

TEN KEY FACTS

1: The company was founded in 1981.
2: Level 9's first game was produced for the kit computer, the Nascom.
3: A-code, the in-house interpreter, was even more efficient than raw Z80 assembler.
4: The KAOS game engine stands for Knight Orc Adventure System.
5: The text for *The Archers* game was completed by the radio series' writers.
6: *Scapeghost* writer Sandra Sharkey founded and was the first editor of the popular adventure fanzine *Adventure Probe*.
7: The Lenslok security contrivance utilised on some of Level 9's earlier games was the most hated anti-piracy device ever devised.
8: Level 9 reportedly split with Rainbird because it felt the company was favouring adventure label mate Magnetic Scrolls, in marketing terms.
9: *Knight Orc*'s graphics were digitised paintings.
10: *Gnome Ranger 3* was apparently fully designed and ready to be coded but never actually appeared.

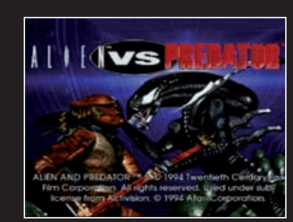
THE MAKING OF...

ALIEN VS PREDATOR



IT WAS THE 'OTHER' REASON TO OWN AN ATARI JAGUAR, AND STILL FEATURES REGULARLY IN TOP-TEN LISTINGS OF THE SCARIEST VIDEOGAMES OF ALL TIME. REBELLION FOUNDERS JASON AND CHRIS KINGSLEY, AND ATARI PRODUCER JAMES 'PURPLE' HAMPTON TALK TO MIKE BEVAN ABOUT DESIGNING A CULT CONSOLE CREATURE FEATURE

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **DEVELOPER:** REBELLION
» **PLATFORM:** ATARI JAGUAR
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25+

The *Alien* movies have been one of the most influential of all film franchises for the videogame industry. A key inspiration for the 'bio-organic' style of a huge number of 2D titles in the Eighties and Nineties, notably the 'Giger-esque' visuals of *R-Type* and *Turrican*, the distinctive, dark futurism of Ridley Scott's original *Alien* inspired countless budding pixel-artists. The saga has spawned dozens of licensed arcade and domestic videogame titles, from platform shooters to scrolling beat-'em-ups and lightgun games, and a range of successful first-person corridor shooters on multiple platforms. The Jaguar outing of *Alien Vs Predator* represents perhaps the biggest leap the licence ever made in the gaming world, throwing in Fox's second most famous creature, the Predator, and presenting, for the first time, a realistic, first-person rendition of close-combat inter-species warfare.

The interactive clash of franchises promised a whole new level of immersion for movie fans – facehuggers bursting onto the screen, Predators decloaking right before your eyes, and the whiplash tail of xenomorphic terrors, all experienced from a perspective planted firmly amid the chaos. Developed across three separate continents, with design and programming teams from Oxford-based developer Rebellion, and support from Atari in Sunnyvale, California, the game was an intriguing, and sometimes strained, exercise in Anglo-American relations. At its best, *Alien Vs Predator* re-creates aspects of the strongest two *Alien* movies, combining the fear and tension of the original film with the all-out gunplay of *Aliens*. But at the time of its inception, the Atari Jaguar was only at prototype stage, and it wasn't even a certainty that the game would be a first-person shooter, or even appear on the system at all.

Rebellion's Jason Kingsley remembers the moment he first learnt of the existence of Atari's 'top secret' console, evidently a surprise to even Atari's own UK-based personnel at that time. "We went to see Alistair Bodin of Atari in their huge office building and warehouse in Slough (complete with brown Hessian wallpaper and not many people in the office), to present a 3D dragon flight simulation for their new Falcon computer," he reveals. "He thought it looked great and asked Bob Gleadow, Atari's UK managing director, to come down to see it right away. When Bob saw it, he commented that it could be a great title for their new console. Alistair was surprised and asked, 'What new console?' Bob replied, 'The Jaguar'. It was the first anyone outside of a very small group in North America had heard of the new machine."

James Hampton, Atari's producer for *Alien Vs Predator*, reveals that the project originally started on Atari's handheld console – the Lynx. "When I first started working at Atari, in the autumn of 1992, one of my first assignments was taking over as producer on a number of Lynx games. One of these was *Alien Vs Predator*, being developed by UK-based company Images. The Lynx *Alien Vs Predator* team had been assembling a demo that featured a game with a Colonial Marine and a Predator going through corridors of an Alien-infested space station. The Lynx games got put on the

» A prototype version of the game, featuring an early HUD layout, blockier character models and 'lives' rather than a health bar.



» This movie-poster-inspired title screen was later replaced by the rendered art used in the game's packaging.



» James Hampton (producer, Atari) in front of an Alien Queen during a visit to London's much-missed 'Alien War' attraction, February 1994.





LOVING THE ALIEN

Retro Gamer asked Jason Kingsley of Rebellion, and Atari producer James Hampton how their respective teams had prepared for the unenviable task of re-creating the worlds of the Alien and Predator on the Atari Jaguar. "We watched the movies again and again on VHS tape," says Jason. "We had to cope with the terrible freeze-framing of VHS. We even photographed the TV screen to get stills – not that easy to do with the awful freeze-frame and CRT interlacing. What we discovered was the visual effects in the movies were created in several different ways, and at times even the same effects were created using two or three completely different techniques. We had to choose the ones that would look best in our game and focused on getting those looking great." James reveals a similar process for the US team. "We spent a few weeks gorging ourselves on all things *Alien* or *Predator*," he says. "We would share ideas for the game during the movie marathons where we watched stuff like the extended editions of *Aliens* on Laserdisc. And we were lucky to have people like Sean Patten, who became one of the game's designers and is the 'face' of the Marine player character in the Marine HUD. He was a die-hard fan who had built replica models of the Colonial armour, weapons and gear which we used for some of the photo materials in the game."

back burner, however, as Atari was shifting its production efforts over to the Jaguar launch."

The Lynx game was never completed (although a prototype of it does exist), and Atari's management briefly considered a version of Activision's Super Nintendo *Alien Vs Predator* game, a *Final Fight*-style 2D beat-'em-up, as an alternative project for the Jaguar. "I didn't think this direction represented the characters and the universe very well and I was eager to find a way to improve the design," recalls James. "As I dug deeper into the project, I discovered numerous references to elements from the Dark Horse comic books, elements that Atari did not have rights for. I used this as a reason to change creative direction, and presented an alternative approach to the internal Atari legal and executive departments, and then to our sub-licensor Activision and our partners at 20th Century Fox."

In the UK, designer and programmer Andrew Whittaker, who had collaborated with *Alien* designer HR Giger on the PC horror-adventure *Darkseed*, was approached by Atari to work alongside Rebellion. Giger had personally recommended him for the new game. Andrew would spend long hours discussing the behaviour and character nuances of the Aliens with their creator, and the Predator's motivation and design with Stan Winston's movie effects department and Fox.

The decision to allow players to experience the game through the eyes of three different characters was one of the first concepts that the Rebellion team hit upon. "Yes, that was Chris and my idea completely," says Jason. "As well as playing the Marine, we also wanted to play the bad guys (Aliens) and the neutral guy (Predator). What it meant though was making three games in one, so it was a very ambitious and challenging game to create."

Another significant breakthrough was the use of digitised textures – modelled from visual references from the films – for the game's environments. "We had already succeeded in getting some texture mapping in *Eye Of The Storm* for the PC, and were excited about the visuals we could get using this technique," explains Chris Kingsley, Rebellion's technical director. "One particularly tough problem we faced was how to create realistic looking texture maps – up to that point all the graphics in games had been hand drawn."

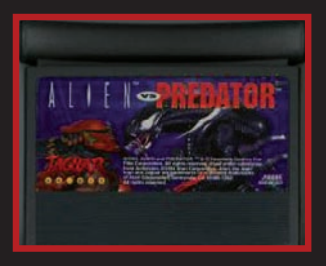
"Toby and Stuart, the artists at Rebellion, had this cool idea to use photographs of models instead of computer-generated artwork for all of the game," explains James. "The results worked surprisingly well. The walls and floor segments were all tiles that they had made with painted model parts, and they used off-the-shelf model kits of the Alien and Predator characters to create a kind of 'stop motion' animation for all of the frames of creatures' movements in the game."

James helped the British art department by thoughtfully smuggling a handy Xeno-model out of the US. "UK Customs wouldn't allow them to receive a model of the Alien Queen that they had ordered by mail, and so on one of my visits over to their offices in Oxford, I went to Mr Big's Toyland in Waltham,

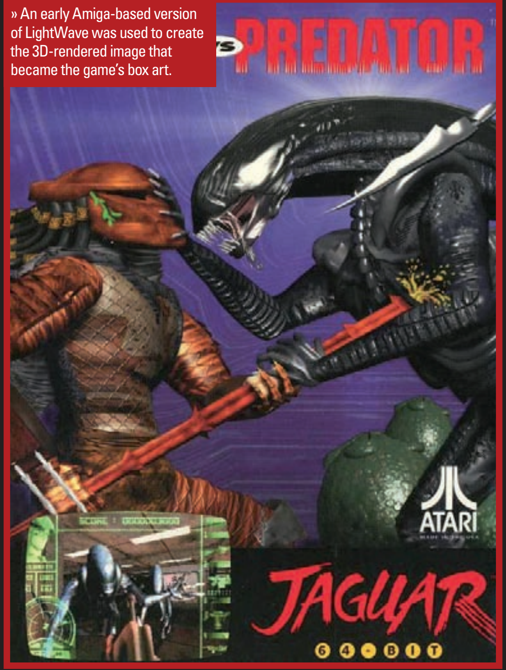
THE MAKING OF...

ALIEN VS PREDATOR

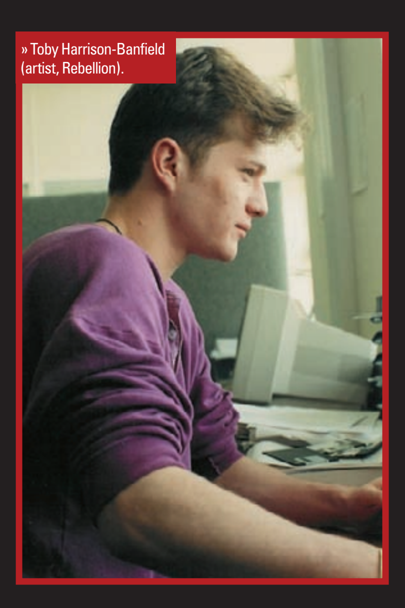
MEMORY LAPSE



Trying to squeeze the game into a standard 2MB Jaguar cartridge proved quite a headache for both teams, with Rebellion in particular spending a lot of time compressing textures and data to fit. But, unknown to the UK team, Atari was about to make an unusual u-turn. "The photorealistic textures looked great but also took up a lot of space and eventually we ran out of room for all of the components of the game on the original cartridge size," explains James. "With some pressure from Fox (to add some additional Alien animation) and some campaigning internally, Sam Tramiel again made the 'right choice' and let us double the cartridge size. The decision came at the 11th hour, about a month before the game was due to be sent to manufacturing, and we used most of the space for extra audio samples throughout the game. This allowed us to add in more audio effects, which really brought the game together and pushed it to a new level. The extra space also allowed us to include some nice touches like adding Sandra Miller's recorded dialogue, who in addition to being married to Richard Miller, one of the chief Jaguar hardware engineers, added her distinctive British accent for the space station's computer voice."



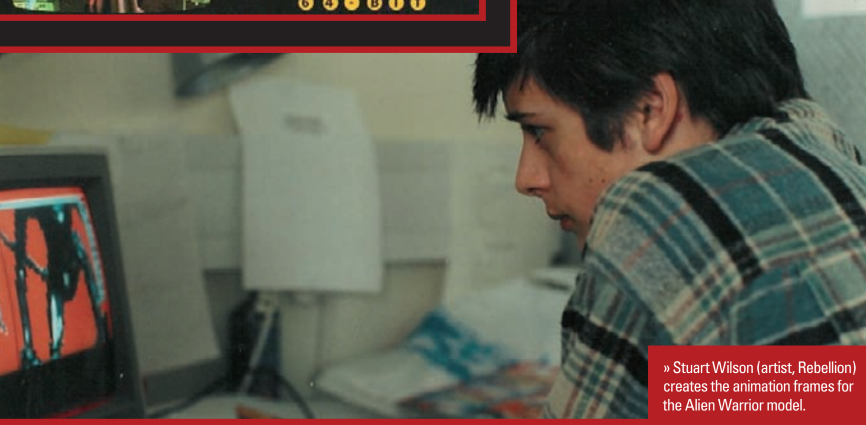
» An early Amiga-based version of LightWave was used to create the 3D-rendered image that became the game's box art.



» Toby Harrison-Banfield (artist, Rebellion).



» Team photo taken in front of Atari's offices in Sunnyvale in the summer of 1994. (From left to right) Nathan Brenholdt, Dan McNamee, Lance Lewis (with cap), Mike Beaton, Hank Cappa, Keoni Los Banos, James 'Purple' Hampton, Andrew Whittaker, Andrew Keim, Sean Patten (sitting on sign with sunglasses), Paul Foster, James Grunke.



» Stuart Wilson (artist, Rebellion) creates the animation frames for the Alien Warrior model.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

EYE OF THE STORM (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, PC
YEAR: 1993

CHECKERED FLAG
SYSTEMS: JAGUAR, LYNX
YEAR: 1995

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR
SYSTEMS: PC, MAC, GBA
YEAR: 1999

ROGUE TROOPER
SYSTEMS: XBOX, PC, PS2
YEAR: 2006



Massachusetts, tracked down the model, and smuggled it in my suitcase to get it to them in time!"

"We created all the art in Oxford," adds Chris. "We did this by first building small-scale models of the panels. These were 9cm by 9cm squares of cardboard with bits of paint, straws, plastic gubbins stuck and moulded in, then photographed by Jason in 35mm. We then processed and scanned the photographs in using a flat-bed scanner, and finally touched them up by hand in a paint package, and added any transparent areas. We still have most of the panels in our archive."

Working with a console that was still effectively in the development stage was an unusual process for both teams. Andrew remembers constantly rewriting various graphic routines as the Jaguar's hardware was being finalised, before hitting on the idea of coding new game elements, then suggesting the hardware features to implement them. "We made numerous design decisions based on what was technically feasible, trying to play to the strengths of what we had working," admits James. "In some instances what may have been a limitation turned into an identifying feature in the game. So when we found that the memory limitations weren't going to let us have a movie-like symphonic score, we opted to go the other direction, and create an eerie soundscape from the ambient space station noise. The result added a lot of dramatic tension and captured the spooky feeling of being alone – until a threatening Predator clicking sound appeared nearby."

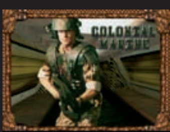
As for the role of id's games – *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* – as an influence on *Alien Vs Predator*, Jason and Chris are quick to deny that they had much of an impact, if any. "We weren't aware of *Doom* at that stage, and only halfway through development did we hear about *Wolfenstein*, so we were using different reference points (step-based dungeon exploration titles) adding realistic textures and vision modes, and adding a dash of acid blood to block your path." James, however, acknowledges a certain level of influence, at least from his own team's perspective. "Before starting at Atari, I had spent time playing the first 'episodes' of *Wolfenstein* that were being released on bulletin boards," he admits. "This kind of first-person gameplay definitely influenced me, and over the course of the *AVP* development cycle, we encouraged all of the team to play games like *Wolfenstein* and *Doom*. We envied the network gameplay, and we always speculated what it would be like to make a head-to-head version of *AVP*, which wasn't feasible in the time frame we had."

Andrew wanted to add a high level of artificial intelligence for the extraterrestrial species, particularly 'pack-hunting' behaviour for the Aliens, which would work in groups to lead unwary players into traps – a feature he had christened 'Alien Chess'. In the long run this subtle feature would distinguish the game from its rivals *Doom* and *Wolfenstein*, whose monsters would simply become active when the player approached, rather than actively chase or lie strategically in wait from the point the player entered their virtual environment.





MAIN PLAYERS



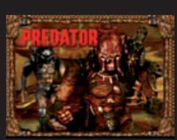
COLONIAL MARINE

Mission: Initiate the base self-destruct and escape.
The Marine (christened 'Lance Lewis' after one of Atari's level designers) is the weakest and slowest of the three 'species' so must rely on his resourcefulness to survive. With no weapons or security clearance at the start of the game, players must search for arms, tap into the base computer network and security system to access higher levels, and use air ducts and elevators to reach the safety of the escape pod.



ALIEN WARRIOR

Mission: Rescue the Queen from the Predator's ship.
With endless fangs and a carbonite exoskeleton, Aliens can tear through the base dispatching weaker species with ease. The main advantage of playing as the Alien is the ability to 'cocoon' unfortunate Colonial Marines, using a swift claw and tail-swipe combo, which can then be hatched to provide extra 'lives'. And remember, individual xenomorphs are expendable, it's all about the survival of the Alien breed.

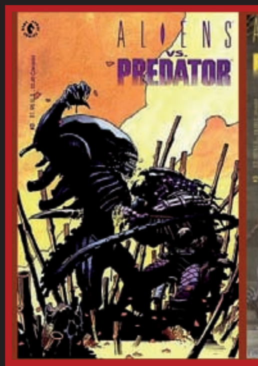


PREDATOR

Mission: Claim the skull of the Alien Queen.
The Predator has an unusual 'honour' system, which can be used to gain more increasingly destructive hardware, including the infamous 'smart disks' and shoulder cannon weapons. Although the Predator has the ability to 'cloak', killing with honour means doing so while visible, or risk losing 'honour points', along with your weaponry. Because of his bulk, the Predator is the only character unable to use the air ducts.



» Rebellion founders Chris (left) and Jason Kingsley, summer 2008.







» The original 1990 Dark Horse comic series that kick-started a titanic movie-crossover franchise.

In the spring of 1994, the game reached a critical point in its development. "Rebellion had got the game into a 'first playable' condition, where you could walk around a randomly generated maze," remembers James. "The photorealistic look of the models really worked well, however, there was no structure or gameplay and the project was reaching the end of its original schedule and budget. To his credit, Sam Tramiel, the president at Atari at the time, resisted the urge to cut all the game features and just 'ship it', and followed my plan to push the schedule to a fall release and bring Rebellion programmers Mike Beaton and Andrew Whittaker to California to work on site for the summer."

Andrew took the 'long way round', with a (previously scheduled and unavoidable) business visit to Kuala Lumpur, where he set up a temporary development station at the home of his Malaysian host. With team members split between locations at Rebellion and Atari, and sometimes at various points across the globe, it was inevitable that things didn't always run smoothly. "There were a lot of politics too at that time, and many arguments about credits and so on," reveals Jason. There were tales of corporate kindness, too. When the game was finally completed, a grateful Sam Tramiel gave Andrew a hefty bonus, along with the keys to his brand new sports car, and told him to take off for a two-month vacation.

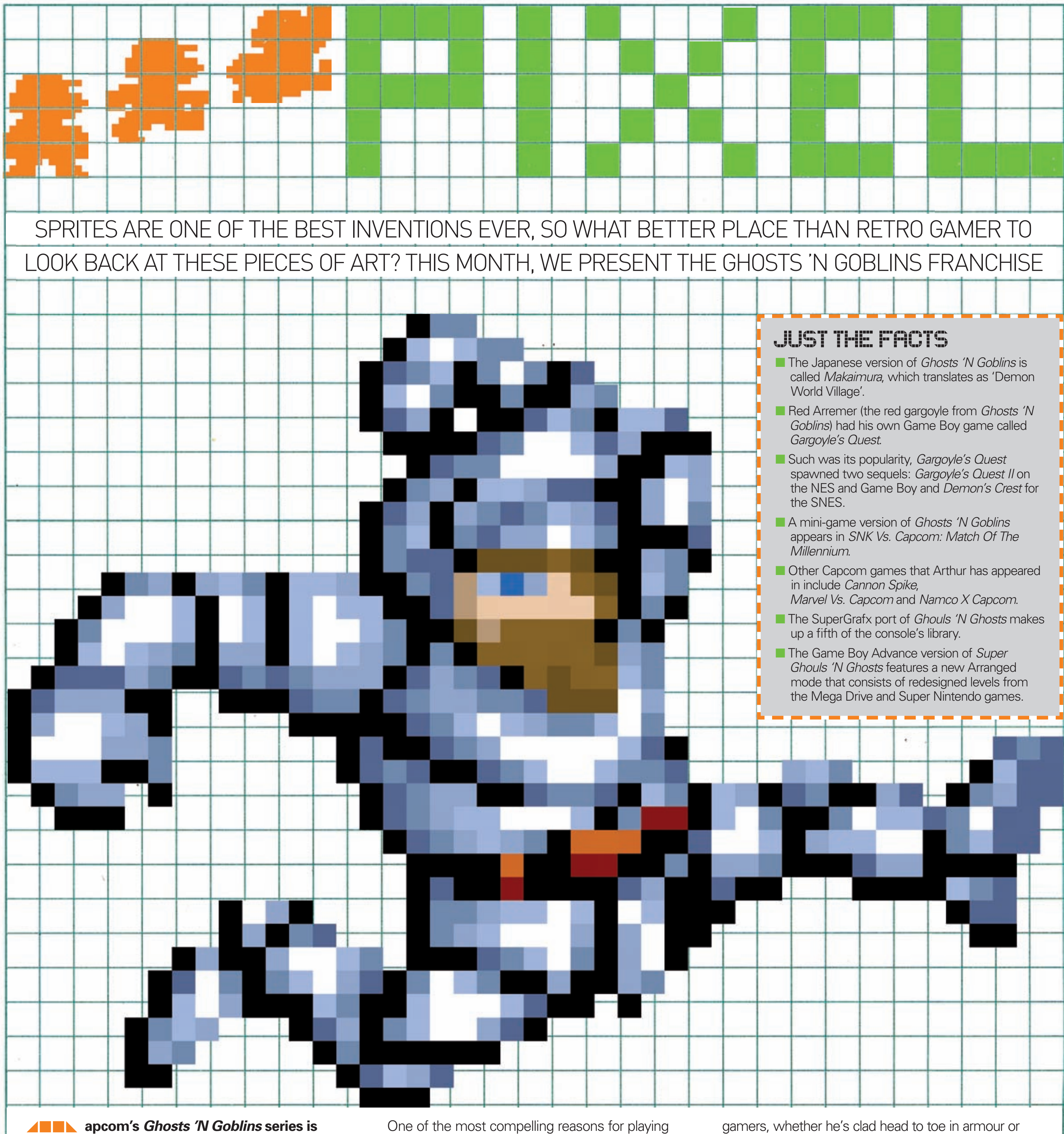
Alien Vs Predator garnered generally favourable reviews on its release, including a 98% rating in US publication *GameFan*. *Edge* magazine, however, described the game as "a lumbering, lame and unfocused imitation of *Doom* that only the most masochistic gamers will get anything out of," awarding it a less-than-stellar four out of ten review score. "Oh yes, everyone else gave it a nine out of ten, but *Edge* didn't!" chuckles Jason. "Everyone is entitled to their opinions, but they also have to face up to criticism of that sort of score from history."

The game was ultimately successful, selling around 300,000 units, and becoming one of the Jaguar's 'killer apps', alongside Jeff Minter's brilliant *Tempest 2000*. "We had a great time working on *Alien Vs Predator*," admits Jason. "It was one of the first titles we worked on as Rebellion. The company has grown from one employee in our basement to over 310 people at multiple locations throughout the UK, and we still love making games." Rebellion has famously continued the science-fiction theme, producing the well-received *Aliens Vs Predator* sequel for the PC, and branching into publishing, after the acquisition of *2000AD* and its sister title *Judge Dredd Megazine*.

Perhaps the greatest lasting testament to the Jaguar game is the fact it still ranks highly on lists and polls of all-time scariest videogames (such as a recent fourth placing at Gametrailers.com). "I was at a Comic-Con in San Diego one year, when a fan stopped me because I was wearing one of the '*AVP*' development 'crew' shirts that I had made up for the team," says James. "They shook my hand saying how much they liked the game and how many nights they stayed up all night playing it, scaring the heck out them. Hearing it then, and now with these polls, makes me think that all the times we worked all night making the game… it was worth it."

Project *Ghosts 'N Goblins*

PIXEL



SPRITES ARE ONE OF THE BEST INVENTIONS EVER, SO WHAT BETTER PLACE THAN RETRO GAMER TO LOOK BACK AT THESE PIECES OF ART? THIS MONTH, WE PRESENT THE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS FRANCHISE

JUST THE FACTS

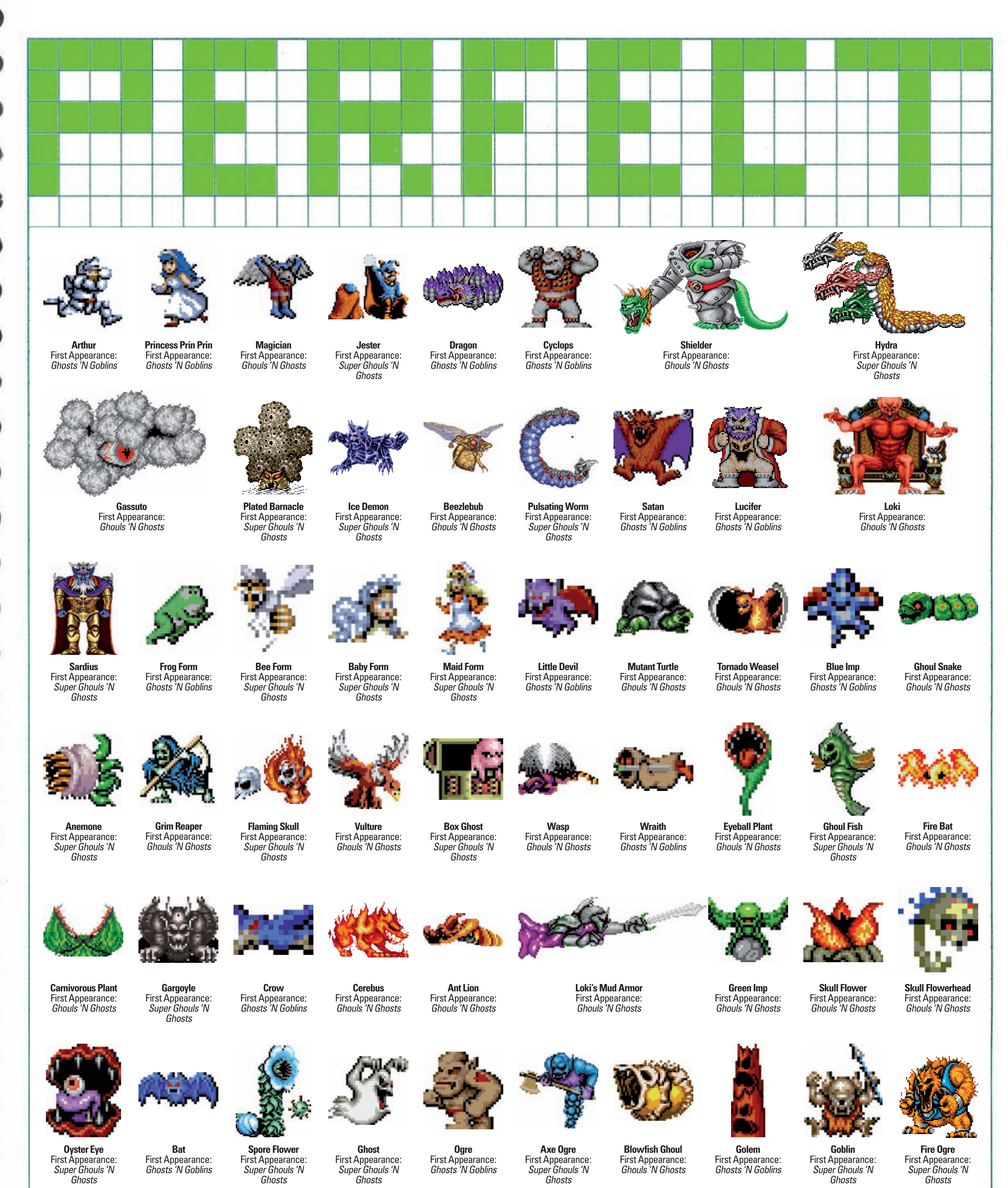
- The Japanese version of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* is called *Makaimura*, which translates as 'Demon World Village'.
- Red Arremer (the red gargoyle from *Ghosts 'N Goblins*) had his own Game Boy game called *Gargoyle's Quest*.
- Such was its popularity, *Gargoyle's Quest* spawned two sequels: *Gargoyle's Quest II* on the NES and Game Boy and *Demon's Crest* for the SNES.
- A mini-game version of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* appears in *SNK Vs. Capcom: Match Of The Millennium*.
- Other Capcom games that Arthur has appeared in include *Cannon Spike*, *Marvel Vs. Capcom* and *Namco X Capcom*.
- The SuperGrafx port of *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* makes up a fifth of the console's library.
- The Game Boy Advance version of *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* features a new Arranged mode that consists of redesigned levels from the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo games.

Capcom's *Ghosts 'N Goblins* series is easily one of the toughest franchises around and has an insane difficulty factor that will test even the most seasoned gamer. However, despite the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* franchise's complexity there are many reasons why you'll want to progress through the tough as granite levels.

One of the most compelling reasons for playing through this ridiculously hard franchise is its great level and creative sprite design. While the series by its very nature is dark and overbearing, the same can't be said for its cartoonish visuals, which juxtapose well against the many macabre locations Arthur finds himself in.

He may not be as iconic a figure as Mario or Sonic, but Arthur remains instantly recognisable for many gamers, whether he's clad head to toe in armour or simply running around in his boxers. The same can also be said for Arthur's foes, particularly those from *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, where the franchise's cartoony villains really came of age.

So here then are some of the best pixel monstrosities to ever appear in a videogame. How many of them do you remember vanquishing?


Arthur
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Princess Prin Prin
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Magician
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Jester
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Dragon
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Cyclops
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Shielder
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Hydra
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Gassuto
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Plated Barnacle
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Ice Demon
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Beezlebub
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Pulsating Worm
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Satan
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Lucifer
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Loki
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Sardius
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Frog Form
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Bee Form
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Baby Form
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Maid Form
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Little Devil
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Mutant Turtle
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Tornado Weasel
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Blue Imp
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Ghoul Snake
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Anemone
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Grim Reaper
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Flaming Skull
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Vulture
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Box Ghost
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Wasp
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Wraith
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Eyeball Plant
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Ghoul Fish
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Fire Bat
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Carnivorous Plant
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Gargoyle
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Crow
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Cerebus
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Ant Lion
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Loki's Mud Armor
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Green Imp
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Skull Flower
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Skull Flowerhead
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Oyster Eye
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Bat
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Spore Flower
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Ghost
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Ogre
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Axe Ogre
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Blowfish Ghoul
First Appearance:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Golem
First Appearance:
Ghosts 'N Goblins
Goblin
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Fire Ogre
First Appearance:
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts

XYBOTS

IT'S LIKE GAUNTLET III, ONLY NOT



- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £250+



HISTORY

Xybots **is one of those games that no one appears to love as much as I do. Ever since I first spied it in a Porthcawl arcade – we went there a lot as kids – I've been totally transfixed by the frantic blaster and even went so far as to securing an actual arcade machine (although this was nipped in the bud as soon as the missus saw just how big it was).**

Originally starting off life as *Gauntlet III*, Ed Logg's initial idea was rejected when Atari decided that blowing up huge robots was more fun than taking out grunts and demons. While I don't necessarily agree with the final decision, I'm still glad Logg went ahead with the project, as, for me, it's easily one of his best achievements.

Sure you can see the nods to *Gauntlet* (players still descend down into the next new stage) and you could argue that the fiddly controls and simplistic maze design mean that *Xybots* is a case of plenty of style and no real substance, but that doesn't mean I'm going to agree with you. A good player could soon get used to quickly navigating around *Xybots'* many levels, and that twisting joystick was actually pretty easy to use once you knew what you were doing.

Still, it was the excellent multiplayer mode that really elevated the gameplay, and there was nothing better than clearing a stage full of enemies with a friend by your side – except, of course, for nicking all the goodies while his back was turned.

With its clever pseudo-3D visuals, raucous sound effects and hectic gameplay, *Xybots* proves itself to be a thoroughly entertaining blaster that requires a surprising amount of brainwork if you want to nab all the best bonuses before your friend. It also went on to receive some pretty damned good conversions, with the Atari Lynx and Amiga being particularly impressive. Ultimately though, it's the arcade version I have fondest memories of and thanks to Midway's excellent *Arcade Treasures 2*, I'm still playing it two decades later.

ROCK
43%ENERGY
SCORE
1600
=11
= 1
1 1 1
1
4 CREDITS
200



ACE
44%ENERGY
SCORE
200
= 8
1
1
1
1
5 CREDITS
EVEL 2

ACORN ELECTRON

IN THE WAKE OF THE ACORN ELECTRON'S 25TH BIRTHDAY, STUART GOODWIN REFLECTS ON THE TALE OF THE BEIGE BOX THAT WENT FROM MUST-HAVE CHRISTMAS PRESENT TO THE 8-BIT OUTCAST THAT ALMOST SUNK ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST BELOVED COMPUTER MANUFACTURERS

Year released: 1983

Original price: £199

Buy it now for: £10-£20

Associated magazines: Electron User, Micro User, Acorn User, A&B Computing, Acorn Programs

Why the Acorn Electron was great… The Electron offered the main functionality of the BBC B at half the size, and at a fraction of the cost. It had strong software backing, and boasted one of the best keyboards of any computer, with great feel and responsiveness, and a variety of shortcuts to common BASIC commands. And it was built to last, too.

After the roaring success of the BBC Microcomputer, Acorn was a company going places. It had conquered the schools market almost unchallenged, and with a cheaper, cut-down sibling to the Beeb designed for home use on the way, it was massively confident that it could dominate the marketplace. Four months ahead of the Electron's launch, joint managing director of the company Chris Curry was in bullish mood. "We are not placing any limits on the size we can grow to," he told *The Times*. "We see the Electron as a very powerful threat to the existing dominance by Sinclair and the Commodore VIC-20. We hope to get half the home computer market."

"It was absolutely manic – an insane time really," recalls Tom Hohenberg, Acorn's former marketing manager. "There were exhibitions going on all the time, and there'd be 50,000 to 60,000 people besieging the stands. The BBC Micro was selling like hot cakes – we couldn't make them quickly enough – so there were huge hopes for the Electron. Half the size, half the price, and the same sort of power. We were buzzing."

Lessons had clearly been learnt from the supply problems that had beset the BBC. Thankfully, due to the machine's tie-in with the broadcaster, the Beeb still went on to become very successful. Six months ahead of the Electron's launch, Curry told *The Guardian* that the new model would not even be advertised, let alone sold, until they were "completely confident that stocks are available". "More than almost anybody else we have suffered in the past from problems of lack of product when the demand is high," he said. "We are not going to let it happen again."

Launch day arrived on 23 August 1983, and anticipation was massive. The first review of the new machine was in, and so glowing that Acorn quoted it extensively on the full-page advertising it took out in the newspapers. "Compared to other micros in its price range, the likes of the Spectrum, Oric and VIC-20, the Electron wins on all counts," *What Micro?* magazine said. "It has better graphics, a better keyboard, and faster and more versatile BASIC. Acorn had better be ready for a rush, there's going to be one." If only Acorn had paid closer attention to that last line.

Acorn's strategy was to show parents that the Electron was a way of bringing their learning at school on the BBC into the home, and a £300,000 TV ad was commissioned to make the point. "It took three days to shoot, and was quite an epic production," says Hohenberg. "There were lots of kids and several sets. We spent £3 million on airtime." The marketing of the machine was so successful that a reported 300,000 orders were received for the run-up to Christmas 1983.

INSTANT EXPERT

The Acorn Electron was a cut-down version of the BBC Model B, retailing for half the price of its bigger brother. The Electron originally retailed for £199 from August 1983 to January 1985, before being cut to £129 and later to £99.

The Electron's size was based on a cardboard tissue box. It was roughly half the depth of the BBC Micro, although the Plus 1 and Plus 3 expansion boxes released for it increased its dimensions to approximately the same size.

Acorn spent £3.3 million on TV advertising to showcase the Electron in the months following its August 1983 launch. Prior to this campaign, its advertising budget was £1.5 million across the entire company.

300,000 Electrons were ordered following the machine's launch. Due to a problem with production of the computer's ULA chip, however, only one in ten worked, meaning that only 30,000 reached shops by Christmas 1983.

Like the original IBM PC and ZX Spectrum, the Electron features just one sound channel, cut down from the BBC's three melodic and one noise channels.

Most Electron titles run on the BBC, although due to the cut-down hardware, many BBC releases won't run on the Electron, and some of those that do run too fast to be playable.

At its peak in 1985, market research showed that the Electron was the UK's joint second bestselling computer, alongside the Commodore 64, but behind the Spectrum.

Somewhere between 1,200 and 1,500 games are estimated to have been created for the machine, as well as several hundred more educational titles.

Two dedicated emulators exist for the Electron – Tom Walker's Elkulator and Thomas Harte's ElectrEm.

Good condition second-hand models now sell for around £10-£20 on eBay. The official Acorn tape decks and Plus 1 and 3 expansion boxes are relatively rare in comparison and often fetch sums in the region of £20-£30 each.

COMMUNITY ELECTRON SITES TO WATCH

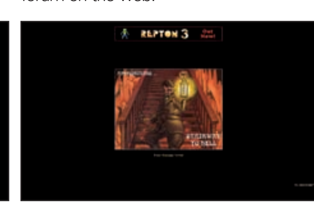
Acorn Electron World

www.acornelectron.co.uk
The best resource for the Electron there is, with disk images, reviews, a vast PD archive, magazine scans (including every issue of *Electron User*), and the entire *EUG* back catalogue. Also, it's "*Desperate* to track down any games it hasn't got, and will pay good money!"



Stairway To Hell

www.stairwaytohell.com
Fantastic site dealing with the BBC and Electron, with massive archives of disk and tape images, articles, utilities, the excellent Lost And Found guide to rumoured and unreleased games, plus the most active 8-bit Acorn-related forum on the web.



Retro Software

www.retrosoftware.co.uk
Fast-rising software house, headed by Stairway To Hell founder Dave Moore alongside 'Samwise'. News on various works in progress including *Repton: The Lost Realms*, plus an active forum and various useful development tools for aspiring programmers.



The BBC Lives!

http://bbc.nvg.org/
It's gone without updates for years, and its front page boasts a 'site of the day' award from 1996! But this is still a fantastic resource for all 8-bit Acorn machines, featuring a staggering amount of documentation for anyone interested in contributing to the homebrew scene.





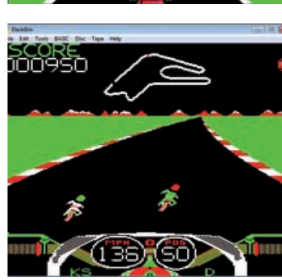
What Micro?

The Electron is bound to be compared to the BBC Micro. However it would be better compared to other micros in its price range, the likes of the Spectrum, Oric and Vic 20. There is however no real comparison as the Electron wins on all counts – it has better graphics, a better keyboard, faster and more versatile Basic. We rate the Electron higher than any of its competition. Acorn had better be ready for a rush, there's going to be one. *What Micro? Sept. '83*



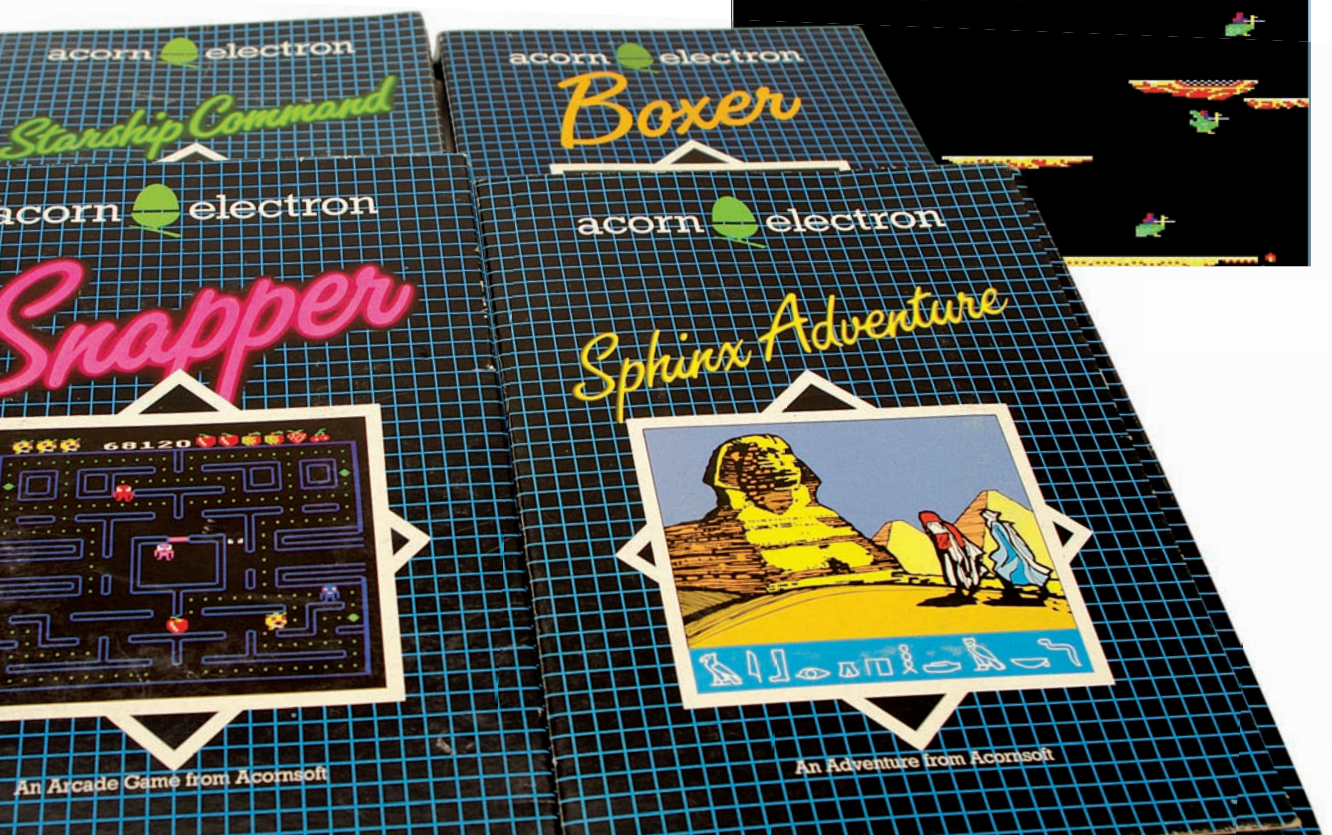








» As well as his excellent *Galaxian* clone *Arcadians*, Orlando – under the name Delos D Harriman – also produced *Skirmish*, a superb version of *Joust*.



VERSIONS

BBC Model B

The big daddy of the Acorn range, this mainstay of the classroom, produced to tie in with BBC TV's Computer Literacy Project, boasted the same 32K as the Electron, but offered four-channel sound and improved graphics capabilities. Key additional features include support for Teletext and the low-cost networking system Econet. Later models included the short-lived B+ models, available in 64K and 128K flavours, although all the B range was eventually superseded by the BBC Master series.

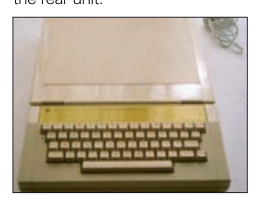


Expanded Electron

Acorn's Plus 1 expansion box added two ROM cartridge slots, plus an analogue interface – often used for joysticks – and a parallel port to enable connectivity with a printer. The Plus 3 came complete with a 3.5-inch floppy disk drive. With both Plus 1 and 3 attached, the dimensions of the Electron became almost identical to the BBC Micro. Other third-party expansion boxes included the Slogger ROMbox and ROMbox Plus, and Millsgrade Ltd's Voxbox speech synthesizer.

BT Merlin M2105

A highly sought-after oddity for hardcore collectors of Acorn hardware, the Merlin consists of a debadged Electron attached to an expansion box, which incorporates a built-in modem and features a printer interface. The Merlin was used throughout all of the UK's Interflora shops from a pilot scheme in 1985 through to the mid-Nineties, and was used to transmit orders around the country. According to internet sources, a speech synthesizer is also apparently incorporated into the rear unit.





» Peter Johnson's *Overdrive* was for many years unchallenged as the best racer on the Electron, as it was thought impossible to create a game featuring corners for the machine. This was finally managed by Kevin Edwards' *Crazee Rider* and Gordon Key's *E-Type*.





Significantly reduced in size from its predecessor, but lacking some of the features and connectivity, the Electron's dimensions had in fact been based on a tissue box, after Acorn found itself unhappy with the case put forward by an industrial designer. "It will have been six to nine months to do the basic design, but then there were problems with the ULA," says former Acorn hardware designer Steve Furber. "We were geared up to produce 300,000," continues Hohenberg, "and then the ULA, the heart of the machine… only one in ten of them worked."

As a result, only 30,000 Electrons hit the shelves in this period. "All these families had promised the kids an Electron for Christmas, and it just wasn't obtainable," says Hohenberg. "We'd get a shipment in, then there'd be a stampede. People were fighting in Rumbelows." The Manchester branch of WHSmith reportedly received 1,500 phone enquiries in one week alone from people desperate to find one in time for Christmas.

Despite the production problems, support for the Electron steadily grew. Acorn's software arm – Acornsoft – led the charge, and its first batch of games included some superb conversions: *Snapper* (an excellent *Pac-Man* clone), *Meteors* (*Asteroids*) and *Monsters* (*Space Panic*), as well as Peter Irvin's fine space-based shooter *Starship Command*. "I sent it to several publishers who all wanted it," he explains. "But I decided to go with Acornsoft because, although their royalty rates were lower, I thought they were the better publisher."

The other main player on the Electron software scene in the early days was Leeds-based Micro Power. Fine conversions of *Frogger* and *Donkey Kong* – *Croaker* and *Killer Gorilla* – sold well, but the real gem was the outstanding maze-based shooter *Cybertron Mission*, heavily influenced by *Berzerk*. Alongside the early software players came the arrival of *Electron User*, the only magazine dedicated solely to the Electron. Launched in September 1983, it became vital to the machine's user base.

Late 1983 also saw the first Electron offerings from Superior Software, a company that would become the most important and long-lasting supporter of the machine. Already active on the BBC scene, Richard Hanson's company was wary of Acorn's supply problems, but dipped a toe into the market anyway. "Richard spent half the night reprogramming a one-armed bandit simulator," says ex-Superior man Steve Botterill. "Beeb sales were brilliant, but it took until the end of the year before Electron sales picked up. We had put about half-a-dozen titles together for it to see how it would go." After small numbers were initially picked up in the countdown to Christmas, Superior Software's big break for the Electron arrived. "In February, WHSmith ordered 1,000 each of seven Electron titles," Botterill recalls. "This marked the start of the Electron selling big numbers."

By February, a backlog of 200,000 orders for the Electron itself reportedly still remained. Acorn's production troubles soon eased, but the missed Christmas rush resulted in tens of thousands of machines arriving into the country with only a fraction of the demand for the machine remaining. "We had this warehouse in Wellingborough," Hohenberg recalls. "Before Christmas, the trucks were lining up at one end wanting to take the few Electrons we had away to stores, but now the trucks were all at the other end, delivering, and the market had completely dried up. Seeing Electrons piled floor to ceiling… it was very depressing."

And the company's troubles didn't end there. Shortly after the Electron's launch, Acorn had attempted to capitalise on its expected success by advertising 11.23 million shares for trading on the London Stock Exchange. The company's performance in the market was soon described in *The Times*, however, as "abysmal". Coupled with ill-fated attempts to set up operations in the USA and Germany, from a position of enormous financial strength, the company soon found itself in serious difficulty. Even Acorn's much-prized contract with the BBC was said to be under threat.

The software market for the Electron was gaining in strength, however. 1984 saw the arrival of Acornsoft's classic *Elite*. "The Electron version was more restricted than the BBC disk edition," says David Braben. "The video hardware on the Electron was very poor compared to the BBC, and we couldn't do some of the trickery we did on the BBC to save memory – this is why it was black and white on the Electron." Even in cut-down form, Electron *Elite* remains one of the finest technical achievements on the machine, and although Braben wasn't overly happy with the version, he and co-author Ian Bell have left one lucky user a present: "We never bought an Electron – one was loaned to us by Acorn, and when we finished, we attached a note to the inside of the case, saying '*Elite* was written on this machine'," he says. "We both signed it, so somewhere, hopefully, it's still there in someone's machine."

Other 1984 arrivals included A&F's *Chuckie Egg*, as well as the evergreen (literally) *Repton*. This *Boulder Dash*-influenced series was Superior's biggest seller, and loomed over the 8-bit Acorn scene throughout the Electron's life. Acorn's popular Plus 1 and Plus 3 expansion boxes were launched too, between them adding joystick and disk-drive interfaces, as well as ROM cartridge slots.

Doubtless spurred on by the steadily increasing user base, Acorn seemingly rallied. The BBC contract was renewed, and by September sales of the Electron were said to be over 90,000. A stronger than expected Christmas saw this number double, with a Dixons spokesman expressing delight that the Electron was selling "four to five times as well as we had expected". This in spite of Acorn sticking to its £199 launch price, the same price as the heavily discounted C64, and vastly more expensive than the all-conquering £129.99 Spectrum 48K. In January 1985, however, Sir Clive Sinclair put the squeeze on still further, slashing the price of the Spectrum+ to £129.99. Acorn responded immediately, dropping the Electron by £70 to go head-to-head at that price point, but the new mark undoubtedly put further pressure on the company – the Electron was widely known to be costlier to produce than the Spectrum.

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: Features a 6502A processor, running at a variable clock rate: 0.5897 MHz-2 MHz, Ferranti Semiconductor ULA coprocessor

Memory: 32K RAM, 32K ROM

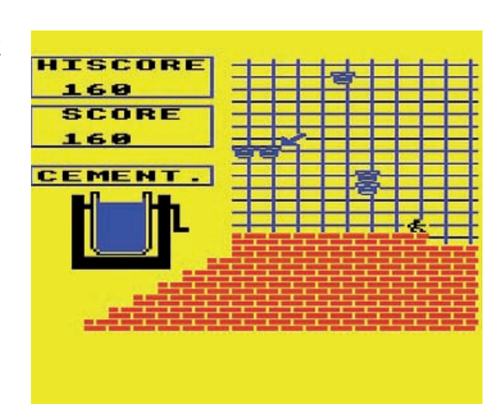
Connectivity: General expansion port at the rear (for Plus 1, Plus 3 and so on), cassette player connector, TV connector (RF modulator), RGB monitor connector

Sound: One-channel sound

Video Resolution: 640x256 pixels (Mode 0)



» *Repton* arrived on the system in 1984, and went on to become the Electron's bestselling game.





» Tynesoft's *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*, unbelievably released at full price, possibly the worst game on the Electron, which also had arguably the most uninspiring artwork.

Despite strong Christmas sales, the company suspended share trading five weeks into the new year after its share price dropped to 28p, down from a high of 193p the previous year. Redundancies followed, and Olivetti stepped in to mop up a cut-price 49.3 per cent stake in the company, increased to a massive 79.8 per cent a few months later. After recording a £10.8 million profit in 1984, Acorn was now reeling from a £22.2 million loss. "That was grim," says Hohenberg. "We just felt like 'oh my god – we've sold out to big brother'." Olivetti chairman Carlo De Benedetti criticised the company in an interview with *The Times*, observing that it'd tried to move into the US market "with forces totally inconsistent with their size, and their financial and managerial strength". A loss-making sub-£100 price tag was soon placed on the Electron, with the bulk of Acorn's warehoused stock 'distress sold' to Dixons. Profits were no longer an issue – Acorn needed cash, and fast.

Remarkably, however, the Electron went on to enjoy a successful year at its rock-bottom price. Figures released by market researchers AGB in May 1985 placed the machine as the joint number two bestselling computer in the UK, with a 15 per cent market share – way behind the Spectrum's 28 per cent, but the same as the C64. It was an unlikely showing for a machine all but written off in some quarters; even as early as September 1984, *Practical Computing* editor Jack Schofield described the Electron as "a crippled thing" and "poor value at any price".

With considerable software support now behind it, the Electron continued to sell well, and although it never got any closer to the Spectrum in the marketplace, its loyal users continued to demand games. One of the machine's main champions was Peter Scott. "I sort of felt all the 'proper' programmers worked exclusively on the BBC, shunning the Electron as it didn't have all the bells and whistles," he says. "It was half-speed in high-res or colourful modes and had single-channel sound that made porting games across from the BBC difficult. I always bore the differences in mind and tried to write games that worked fine on both. It did mean some of my games didn't push the BBC to the limit, but it meant the majority of players got a good game out of it, rather than one great version and one constrained conversion." Scott was renowned for his 'cute' sprites and puzzle-based adventures such as *Thunderstruck*, *Last Of The Free* and *Spycat*, but later became Superior Software's go-to guy for conversions. Ported titles included *The Last Ninja*, *Barbarian* and *Hostages*, but perhaps his finest hour was his outstanding version of *Sim City*. "I loved the challenge of fitting the massive disk-based C64 game into the Beeb," he says. "My proudest programming achievement, even if it didn't sell too well as the BBC and Electron market was in decline by then."

Another key Superior title was the huge space adventure *Exile*. While not as smooth as the BBC version, it was a considerable technical achievement. "The Electron version was the same basic game, except it ran slower," says Irvin. "The video controller was limited in that it couldn't produce the reduced size display needed to make more RAM available for the game. The visible, random border was in fact part of the game program code." Particularly towards the late-Eighties and early-Nineties, as programmers tried to claw back additional memory to push the machine further, unsightly fragments of code were commonplace on screen features in Electron games – a performance-to-prettiness trade-off most gamers were happy to make to enjoy a string of excellent releases.

In 1989, Steve Botterill and his late brother Mark formed 4th Dimension, one of the last major players to emerge on the Electron software scene. Its first success was with Gordon Key's *Holed Out*, an excellent golf simulator. "It used literally every bit and byte, and we were very proud of it," says Botterill. "Gordon's one of the most brilliant programmers I have ever met." 4th Dimension's other acclaimed titles included *White Magic* and the fabulous *Inertia*, as well as a very creditable conversion of the Archimedes racer *E-Type*. With Acorn-related magazines beginning to struggle, however, the market was in serious decline. The demise of *Electron User* in June 1990 effectively marked the end of the active market for the machine, although Superior continued to release occasional compilations of popular favourites, coupled with the odd unreleased title, in its long-running Play It Again Sam series.

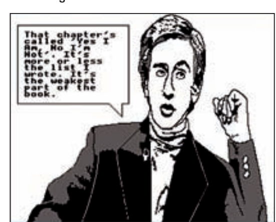
Although dimmed from its heyday, the Electron torch still flickers, thanks to the emulator scene – and the efforts of the Electron User Group (EUG). The Electron is served by two fine emulators – Tom Walker's Elkulator and Thomas Harte's ElectrEm, which allow users to run disk and tape images, as well as the excellent disk image-based *EUG* magazine, currently run by www.acornelectron.co.uk founder Dave Edwards. Now up to issue 68, this annual magazine includes games, demos, utilities and reviews. Also flying the flag is the recently launched Retro Software label, which promises new Electron releases soon. "The first wave of games are nearly all being developed for the BBC Micro," says site co-founder Dave Moore, also the brains behind www.stairwaytohell.com. "However, it's hoped that we'll be able to port most – if not all – to the Electron." Titles lined up for conversion are arcade adventures *Mountain Panic* and *The Two Towers*, but perhaps most intriguing is an incomplete, unreleased sequel to *Repton 4* subtitled *The Lost Realms*.

A quarter of a century on, opinion is still divided on the Electron. Many, particularly those who picked it up cheap, remember a well-built machine with excellent expansion capabilities and a sizeable catalogue of fine games. For those close to Acorn, however, thoughts are more rueful. "While I was happy enough with the look, performance and cost of the Electron," says Steve Furber, "it was a commercial disaster and contributed significantly to Acorn's downfall. So I wasn't very happy about that!" "We never had the critical mass," says Tom Hohenberg. "If we'd had 300,000 machines out there at the start, that would have created enormous demand for the software. But it missed its zeitgeist. If the bloody things had been there, it could have been a brilliant success." Still, happy 25th birthday Electron!

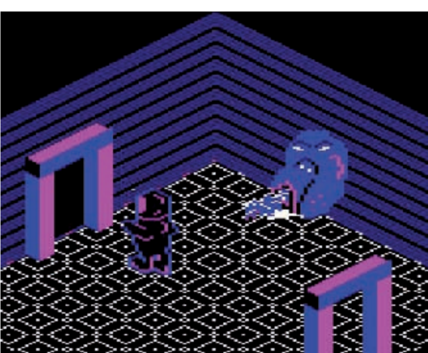
» Andy Williams' Electron version of *Paperboy* was a slow and flickery conversion, but despite poor reviews it still became a huge hit for the machine.



» The quiz-based *You're Alan Partridge*, a PD title released in 2006, made use of Millsgrade's Voxbox to incorporate speech into the game.

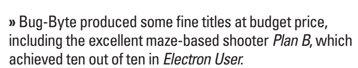




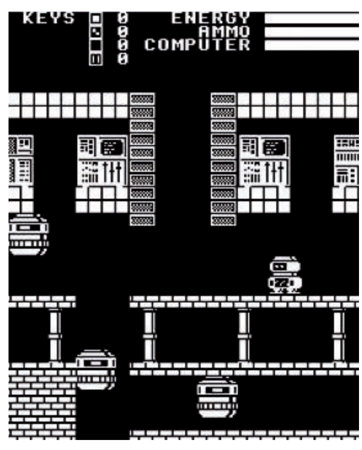




» Blue Ribbon's *Return Of R2* was a terrible attempt to capture the isometric magic of Ultimate's *Alien 8* and *Knight Lore* on the Electron, with this hopelessly crap vomiting monster just one cause of many frustrating deaths.



» Bug-Byte produced some fine titles at budget price, including the excellent maze-based shooter *Plan B*, which achieved ten out of ten in *Electron User*.





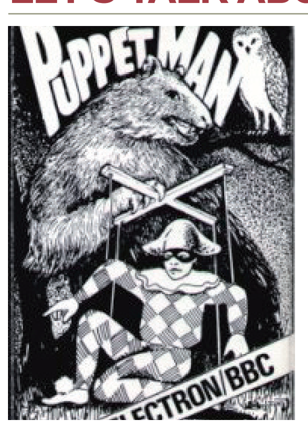




ELECTRON MAG-IC

In October 1983, Database Publications launched the first and only dedicated magazine for the Electron – *Electron User* – as a pull-out section in the Beeb-oriented *Micro User*, before it emerged as a standalone title in January 1984. Mixing news, reviews, type-in games, graphics demos and applications, it became hugely important to the future of the machine. "I guess it was a bit like *Web 2.0* today," says former editor Roland Waddilove. "Most content was user-generated and I think this is one reason why it was so successful." But what about those slow news months? "Sometimes we made it up. Yes, some of those stories about scout groups using Electrons to do their newsletters, accounts and memberships weren't real." While Acorn was struggling in 1985, the mag had an impressive 46 per cent rise in circulation, and survived well into the 16-bit era, eventually folding in June 1990.

LET'S TALK ABOUT TEXT



The text adventure scene was huge on the Electron, helped enormously by *Electron User*'s adventure columnists Merlin (Paul Gardener) and Pendragon (Nic Outterside), who offered sage monthly advice to people stuck in those troublesome mazes. Key publishers included Robico, whose *Enthar Seven* and *The Rick Hanson Trilogy* (apparently not named after the boss of Superior Software) were great sellers. Shards' *Woodbury End* was a popular favourite, as was Epic's *Kingdom Of Klein*, and all of regular *Electron User* correspondent Geoff Larsen's adventures for his own Larsoft label. Making use of Gilsoft's The Quill, Larsen's games – including *Puppet Man* and *Wychwood* – were highly imaginative examples of the genre, in spite of the limitations of the software used to create them. Finally, for laughs, Melbourne House's *Terrormolinos* and *Hampstead* mixed humour with a decent challenge, while Riverdale's TV soap-based *SUDS* games skitted mercilessly on the likes of *Coronation Street* and *Dallas*.





01

02

PERFECT TEN GAMES

Just because the Acorn Electron was a cut-down version of the BBC Micro that didn't mean it didn't sport a host of great games. Granted, some of them appeared on both systems, but if you're a fan, you'll find the following ten titles essential. If we've missed out any classics why not submit them in the form of a profile at www.retrogamer.net…

CHUCKIE EGG

- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **PUBLISHER:** A&F SOFTWARE
- » **CREATED BY:** NIGEL ALDERTON
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CYLON ATTACK

01 **In the tradition** of *Donkey Kong* and *Miner 2049er*, *Chuckie Egg* was a simple, yet staggeringly addictive platformer featuring an everyman character in a very un-everyman situation. Nigel Alderton's golden egg collect-athon boasted a simple and solid control system, a protagonist who had the good sense to bend his knees when he landed from a fall, and wielded brilliantly that 'run and jump while collecting stuff' template. While many of our readers will no doubt have had dealings with the Speccy port, this version plays quite a bit differently. While it's a tad sluggish in comparison, the payoff is a game that feels slightly more solid, controls that feel less erratic, and, we think, on the whole just a fractionally better game.

CYBERTRON MISSION

- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICRO POWER
- » **CREATED BY:** MATTHEW BATES
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BANDITS AT 3 O'CLOCK

02 **Cybertron Mission is** a neat *Berzerk* clone but with an emphasis on searching as well as destroying. Plonked inside one of the most dangerous environments we've seen in a game – a claustrophobic electrified maze, teeming with regenerating psychotic robots – it was your job to venture into the maze, gather a bunch of objects and then return them to a safe. Okay, so the plot could have done with some work but the action came fast and ferocious. Armed with a gun, and eight-directional aiming, the action could get pretty manic – especially at Level 3 when you had to face those annoying Cyberdroid enemies that bounced off walls. *Cybertron Mission* won't be to everyone's taste but there's nothing else quite like it on the Electron.

FRAK!

- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **PUBLISHER:** AARDVARK SOFTWARE
- » **CREATED BY:** ORLANDO AKA NICK PELLING
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BAGITMAN

03 **At the other** end of *Chuckie Egg*'s limber-hero-spectrum sits *Frak!*, a platformer starring a caveman called Trogg who's suffering from acute osteogenesis imperfecta. While insanely maddening there's something endearing about *Frak!*. The premise is simple: steer a fragile caveman through a level full of deathly statues and clean the screen of keys to advance. The game's level arrangements meant that clearing each level required lots of skill and patience. Incidentally, 'Frak' is said to be a bowdlerised version of the word 'F*ck', which is why Trogg spouts the word each time he dies – fracking potty mouth.

RANSACK!

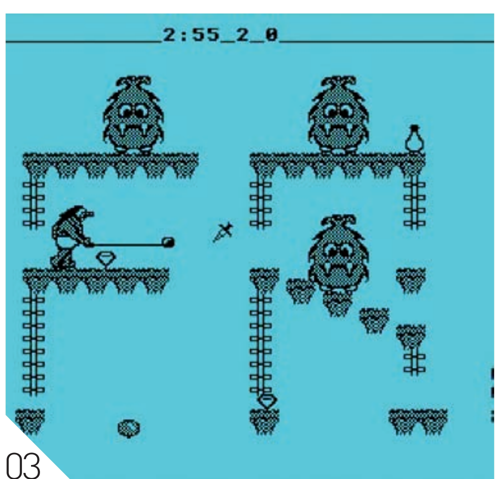
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHER:** AUDIOGENIC LTD
- » **CREATED BY:** PETER SCOTT
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRAHAM GOOCH'S TEST CRICKET

04 **Written by Peter** Scott – one of the most talented Electron coders ever – *Ransack!* was a shoot-'em-up with a difference. Your ship, Al, must fend off wave after wave of enemy droids, flying saucers and odd phallic *Flesh Gordon*-style spaceships, while ensuring he didn't fall through gaps, or get impaled on spikes, that appeared intermittently on the planet surface. *Ransack!* is solid, looks great and is very simple. And the neat bonus round that bookends its stages – which sees your character trying to blast a barrage of alien enemies while bouncing off a small and moving baking tray – offered a quirky break to the gameplay.

REPTON

- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
- » **CREATED BY:** TIM TYLER
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SIM CITY

05 **Despite the similarities** between *Boulder Dash*, Tim Tyler – *Repton*'s creator – has always remained resolute that he'd never played Rising Stars' game. Regardless of whether it's a clone or not, *Repton* is a great game in its own right. Set across 12 stages, *Repton* finds you avoiding falling boulders and the deadly bites from spawning reptiles while trying to tidy the screen of diamonds cerebrally placed around the level. While it looked like *Boulder Dash*, if you boot both games up you'll notice there are some glaring differences between how they play. Basically, *Repton*'s puzzle action feels less chaotic than *BD*'s manic-panic gameplay.



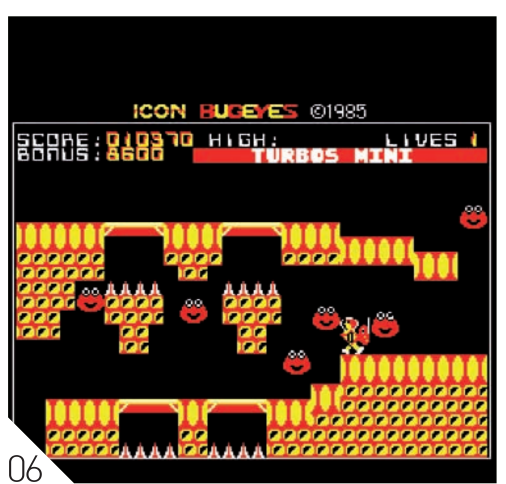
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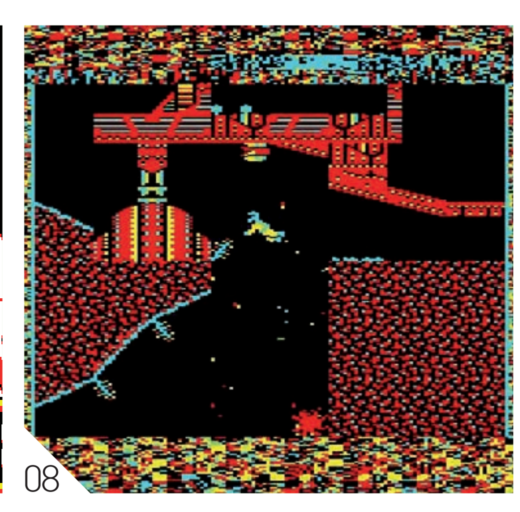
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BUG EYES

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHER:** ICON SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** PACKRAT AND BIT BRAIN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DRAIN MANIA

06 **Bug Eyes is** a novel take on the platform genre that finds your hero's jumping ability vetoed, forcing him to negotiate each screen with only the power to walk left or right. Timing and precision is the order of the day here, and despite the lack of jumping power the game is still fiendishly challenging. The game is a neat take on analytical platformers like *Chuckie Egg* and *Manic Miner* by taking away the hassle of having to collect stuff. Your mission is to get from the top to the base of the screen without dying. Perhaps owing to its simplicity *Bug Eyes* is also annoyingly addictive, and an underappreciated Acorn classic.

THE LAST NINJA 2

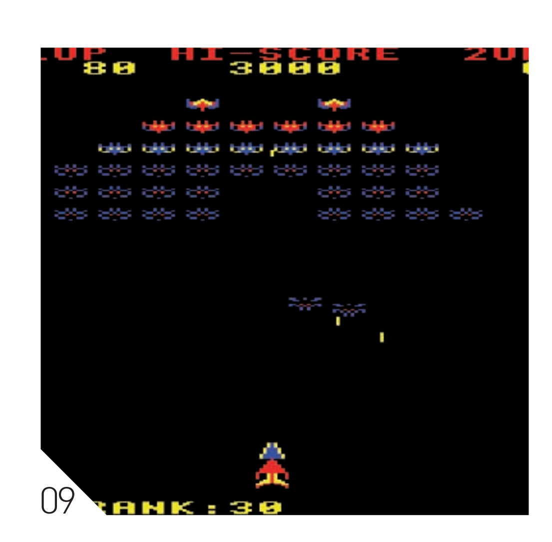
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** PETER SCOTT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RICOCHET

07 **Another Perfect 10** game by Peter Scott, *The Last Ninja 2* really shows off Peter's talent of milking the very best out of the Electron. Boasting fluid animation and effusive visuals, this is a tour de force for the machine that doesn't shirk in any area. The game continues the series' brilliant isometric puzzle action-adventure recipe with aplomb, but this time supplants the faux-3D viewpoint from the swamps and gardens to a lovingly detailed New York locale. How Peter crammed this 500K C64 game into 35K still remains one of gaming's mysteries, but he did it, and along with his port of Will Wright's *Sim City*, *The Last Ninja 2* can stand tall as one of the best conversions on the machine.

EXILE

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** PETER IRVIN / JEREMY C SMITH
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BARBARIAN II

08 **You are Mike** Finn, who, after finding himself stranded on a hostile alien planet, sets about venturing deep inside the cavernous heart of the sphere to find his team and confront a maniacal scientist. A favourite among Electron owners, Peter Irvin's *Exile* is an atmospheric side-scrolling action/adventure game set on a colourful and sprawling world. It's by far the most technically impressive and immersive Acorn game. Owing to its enormity, open-ended gameplay and impressive physics it struck a chord with many Electron owners, and its success on the machine would help it to find its way across a throng of formats.



09

ARCADIANS

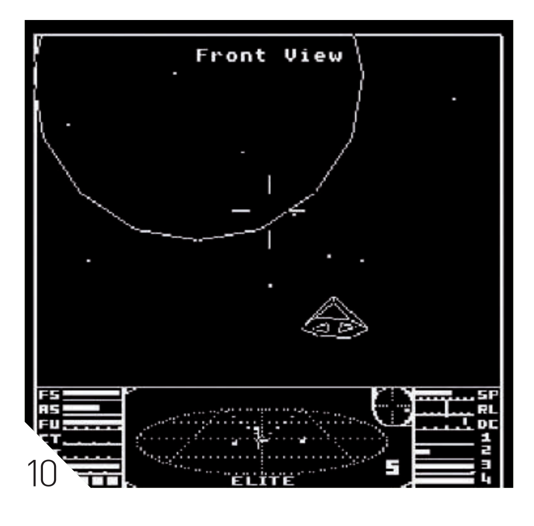
» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHER:** ACORNSOFT
» **CREATED BY:** ORLANDO AKA NICK PELLING
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** HOPPER

09 **A tough choice** this one, it was one we pondered for a while. The Acorn has three decent arcade conversions, and we only had room to put one of them in the top 10. It has a brilliant *Breakout*/*Arkanoid* clone called *Crack-Up*, a fair *Donkey Kong* clone – even if the controls are a wee bit fiddly – called *Killer Gorilla*, and this sublime *Galaxian* homage written by one of the machine's most respected coders. *Arcadians* is pretty slick but also very tricky – those pesky kamikaze aliens are unrelenting, but it's still great fun. It also looks spookily similar to the arcade game, down to the neat explosions that occur when the enemy insects get blasted to the way the front of your ship forms the weapon. It's just a great, great conversion.

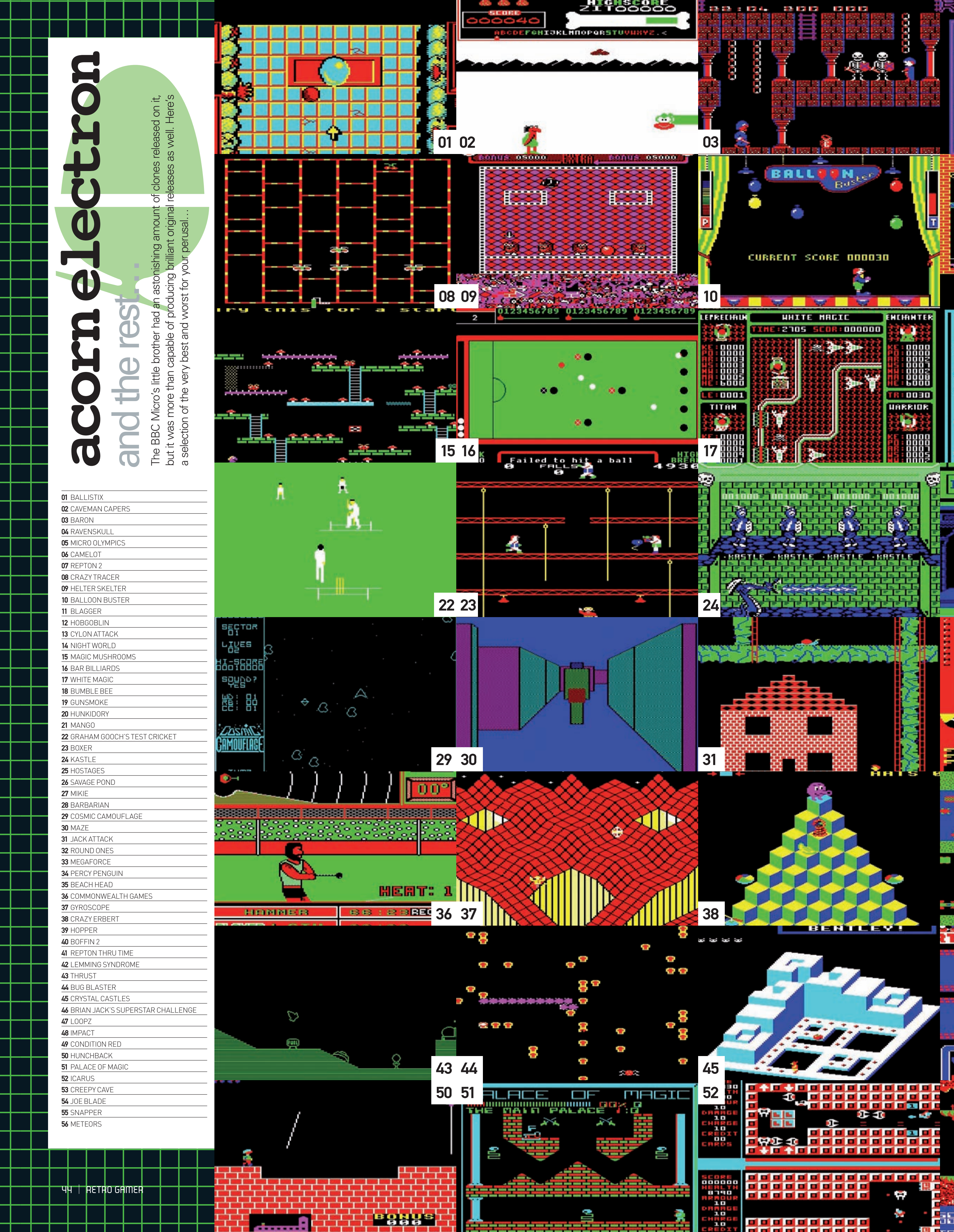
ELITE

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** ACORNSOFT
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID BRABEN AND IAN BELL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FIREBUG

10 **When David Braben** and Ian Bell set about writing *Elite* on their Acorn Electrons, little did they know the impact their free-roaming space trading game would come to have, and continues to have, on the industry. You simply can't talk about the Acorn, strategy or sandbox gaming without bringing Braben and Bell's interstellar opus to the fold. What makes *Elite* so special is that in many ways it's not just a game, it's a living, breathing, wonderfully realised universe – a virtual escape pod for you to go anywhere, do anything and explore to your heart's content. *Elite*'s virtual playground would capture the minds and imaginations of a generation, and is considered one of the most influential, innovative and immersive Electron games ever.



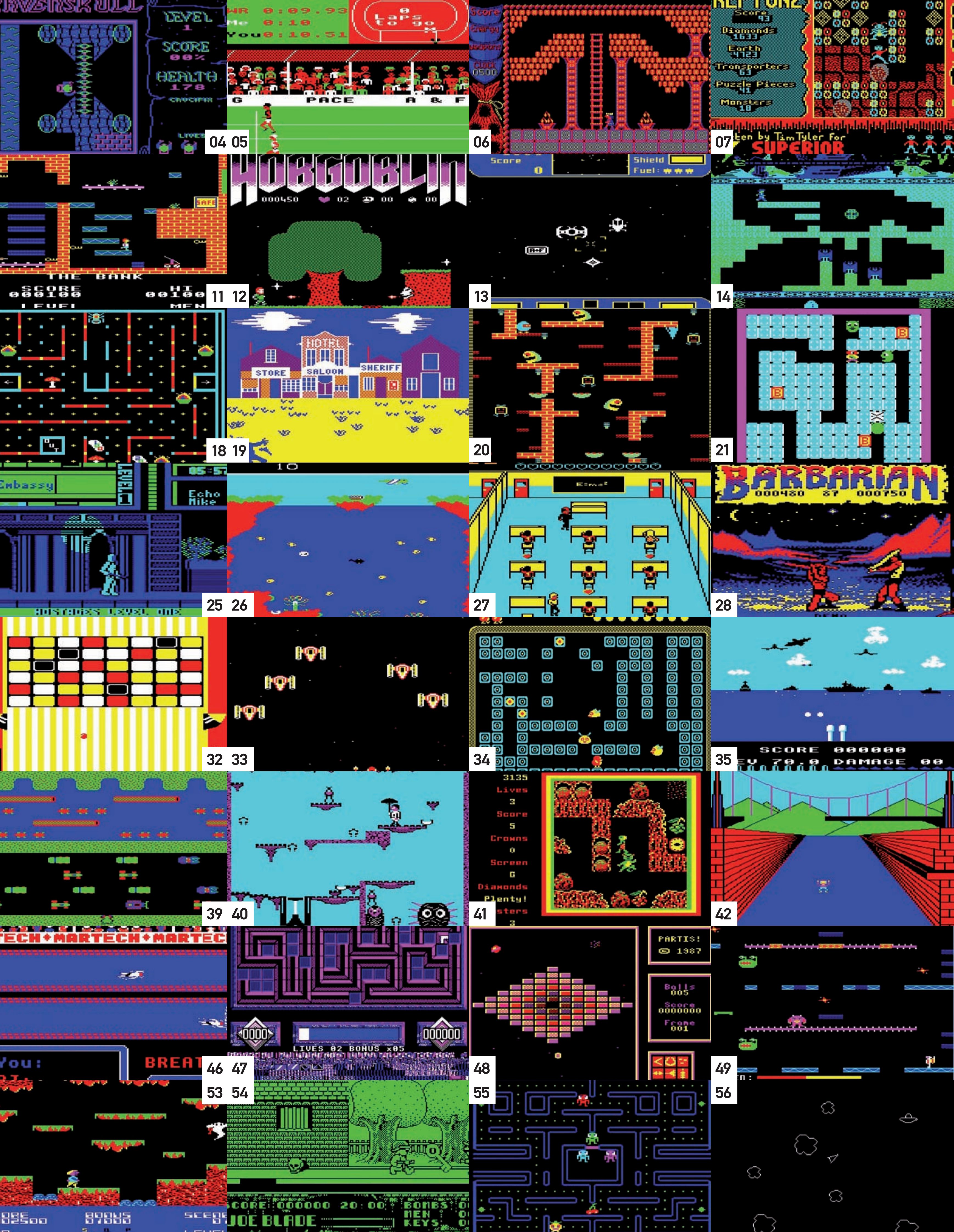
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acorn electron and the rest…

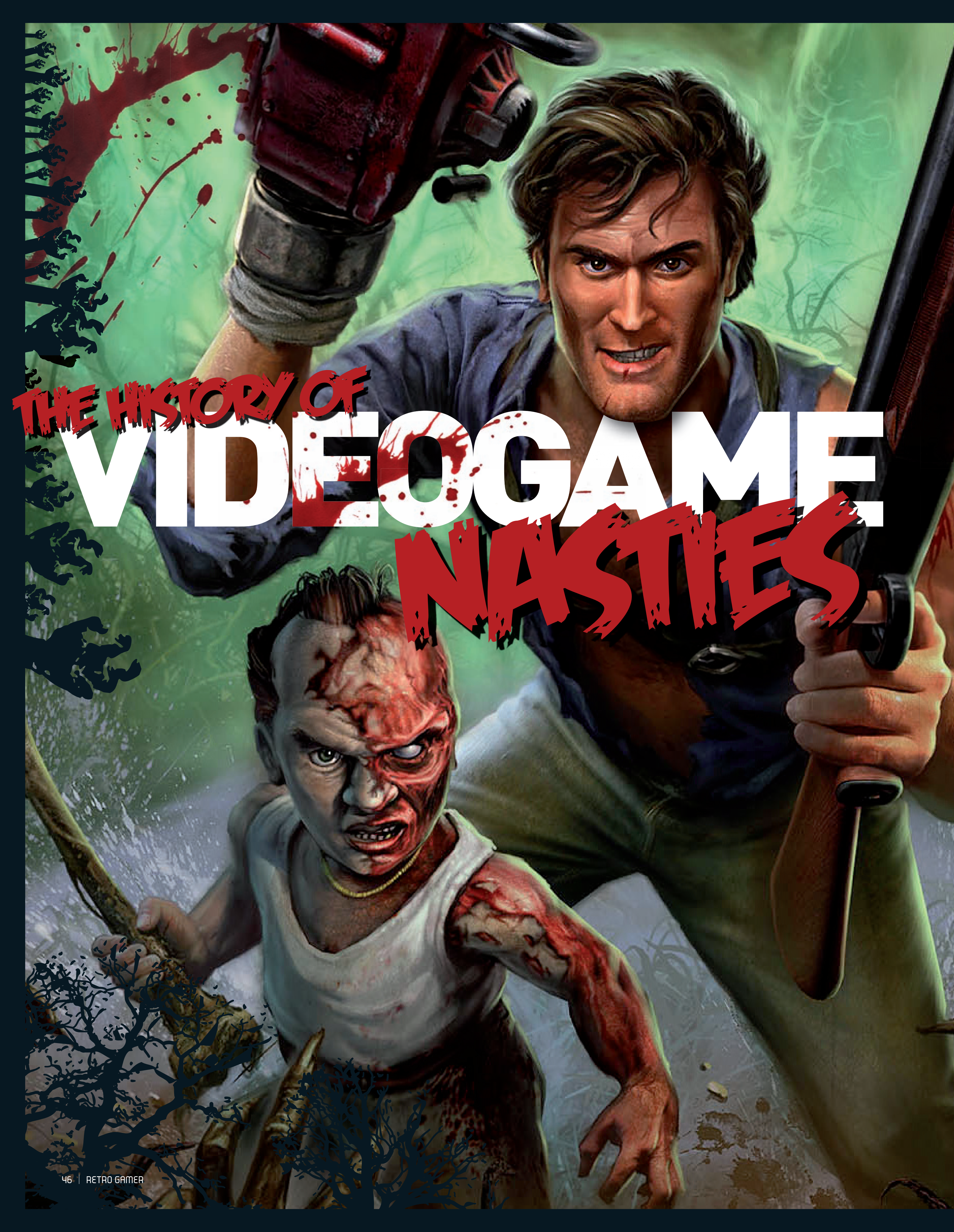
The BBC Micro's little brother had an astonishing amount of clones released on it, but it was more than capable of producing brilliant original releases as well. Here's a selection of the very best and worst for your perusal…

01 BALLISTIX
02 CAVEMAN CAPERS
03 BARON
04 RAVENSKULL
05 MICRO OLYMPICS
06 CAMELOT
07 REPTON 2
08 CRAZY TRACER
09 HELTER SKELTER
10 BALLOON BUSTER
11 BLAGGER
12 HOBGOBLIN
13 CYLON ATTACK
14 NIGHT WORLD
15 MAGIC MUSHROOMS
16 BAR BILLIARDS
17 WHITE MAGIC
18 BUMBLE BEE
19 GUNSMOKE
20 HUNKIDORY
21 MANGO
22 GRAHAM GOOCH'S TEST CRICKET
23 BOXER
24 KASTLE
25 HOSTAGES
26 SAVAGE POND
27 MIKIE
28 BARBARIAN
29 COSMIC CAMOUFLAGE
30 MAZE
31 JACK ATTACK
32 ROUND ONES
33 MEGAFORCE
34 PERCY PENGUIN
35 BEACH HEAD
36 COMMONWEALTH GAMES
37 GYROSCOPE
38 CRAZY ERBERT
39 HOPPER
40 BOFFIN 2
41 REPTON THRU TIME
42 LEMMING SYNDROME
43 THRUST
44 BUG BLASTER
45 CRYSTAL CASTLES
46 BRIAN JACK'S SUPERSTAR CHALLENGE
47 LOOPZ
48 IMPACT
49 CONDITION RED
50 HUNCHBACK
51 PALACE OF MAGIC
52 ICARUS
53 CREEPY CAVE
54 JOE BLADE
55 SNAPPER
56 METEORS



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LEVEL
SCORE
HEALTH
PACE
Score
Diamonds
Earth
Transporters
Puzzle Pieces
Monsters
Written by Tim Tyler for
SUPERIOR
THE BANK
SAFE
HOBGOBLIN
Shield
Fuel:
HOTEL
STORE
SALOON
SHERIFF
Embassy
Echo
Mike
HOSTAGES LEVEL ONE
E=mc²
BARBARIAN
SCORE
DAMAGE
Lives
Crowns
Screen
Diamonds
Plenty!
MARTECH
BREAT
LIVES 02 BONUS x05
PARTIS!
© 1987
Balls
Score
Frame
JOE BLADE
BOMBS
MEN
KEYS
BONUS

The History of Videogame Nasties





» *Fright Night* looks amazing, but the gameplay is sadly just too flat to warrant recommendation.

» *Resident Evil* even borrowed its infamous loading screens from *Sweet Home*.

THE VIDEOGAME-TO-MOVIE TIE-IN WILL PROBABLY ALWAYS REMAIN A CURIO AMONG GAMERS. THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT SEEING OUR BELOVED VIDEOGAMES INTERPRETING CINEMA THAT NEVER FAILS TO PIQUE CURIOSITY. JOIN **STUART HUNT** AS HE HOPS INSIDE A VIRTUAL GHOST TRAIN AND BLOW AWAY THE COBWEBS OF THE HORROR FILM GENRE

At the time that videogame popularity was fast gaining momentum in the US, the horror film genre was also starting to come into its own. The late-Seventies saw four films kick-start a gory offshoot of the horror genre. The movies were (chronologically): *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Black Christmas, When A Stranger Calls* and *Halloween,* and all would usher in the genus of the 'slasher film'.

Horror film picture distributor Wizard Video, having seen the popularity and fast growth of videogames in North America, had ambitions on entering the game space and deduced that the best way to do that would be to publish two Atari 2600 games based on the most popular horror films of the time: *Halloween* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. But when the games' virtual blood-letting saw them shunned by retailers, what should have been a recipe for success instead saw the company spiral into a pit of debt, and eventually led to its fracture.

Quite an unusual departure for its time, perhaps even a videogame first (though we'd argue there's a strong case for Mario in *Donkey Kong*), Wizard's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* found gamers playing the unusual role of villain. Playing the character of chainsaw-wielding maniac Leatherface, the game's premise involves helping the aforementioned psycho slaughter female tourists before the fuel in his chainsaw dries up. Disability aids, fences and cow skulls were strewn across the ground in order to scupper his massacre, and it was your job to steer him around the obstructing debris and help him to maximise his kill count.

Feeling thrown together, shamefully rushed and suffering from heinous bouts of flickering and dire collision detection, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was widely regarded as a videogame monstrosity on its release, with its dreadful graphics being of particular note (Leatherface in particular looks like a green front-door key with comedian Frank Sidebottom's face stuck on it).

While equally dull and repetitive, Wizard's *Halloween* at least seemed to be having a good stab at rendering Carpenter's seminal horror picture. Placing 2600 owners into the shoes of babysitter Laurie Strode, *Halloween*'s gameplay involved escaping from sociopath Michael Myers and dragging terrified kids into the safety of dark panic rooms. Set inside a peculiar two-tiered Day-Glo house, the game employed strange special effects trickery – like having Michael appear out of thin air (just like in the film), having the lights of the house blackout, forcing you to fumble about in the dark, and the comical

"THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE WAS A VIDEOGAME MONSTROSITY"

THE HISTORY OF VIDEOGAME NASTIES



» (Above) We think the *Friday The 13th* games get an unfair rap, they're not that bad. And would you argue with this guy?

» The menacing Freddy Krueger had something of a makeover to help him appeal to mainstream audiences.

beheading of your character when Myers caught up with you. Ironically, it was *Halloween*'s comical gore and general obscurity that has since helped to raise the game's profile and make it a popular cartridge among Atari 2600 collectors.

Director Sam Raimi is probably best known for his work on the *Spider-Man* film franchise, but the auteur began his lucrative film career with a short Super 8 horror film he shot with longtime friend Bruce Campbell. Raimi made the short film, titled *Within The Woods*, with the intention of raising enough money to shoot a feature-length horror film. As luck would have it, his film caught the eye of a film critic, and Raimi was handed a reputed budget of $125,000 to stretch and reshoot his picture. He then set about tweaking his script, Campbell was recast in the lead role and the film was renamed *The Evil Dead*.

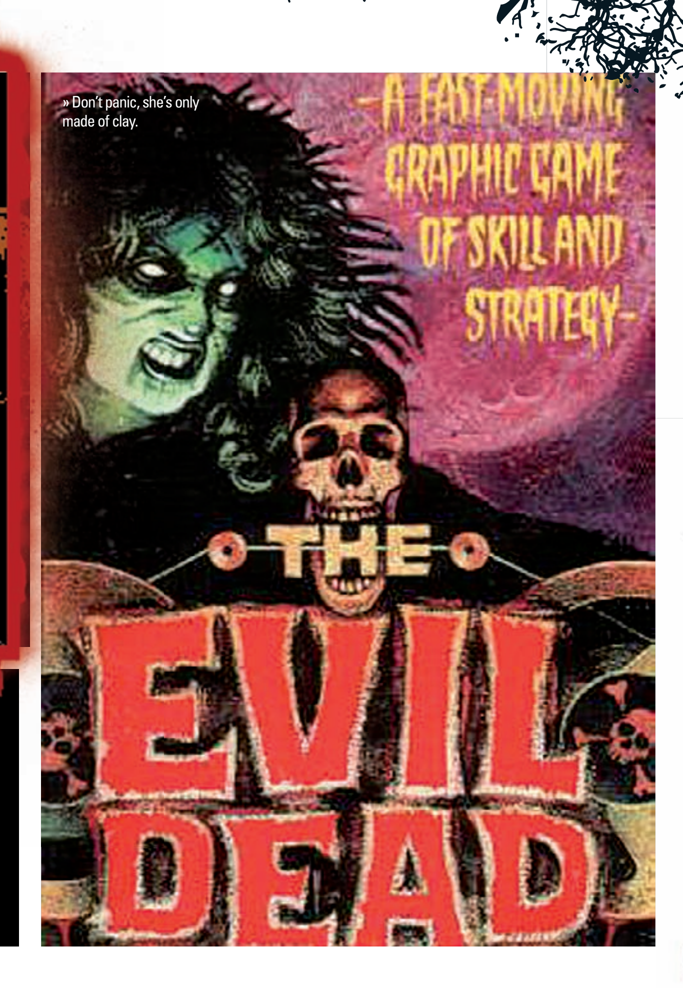
Similar to *Halloween*, Palace's videogame adaptation of *The Evil Dead* builds a simple top-down action game around the key elements of the film. Playing the role of stoic hero Ashley J Williams (Ash), the player must protect his friends from an evil shroud by battening down the hatches of a cabin they're all holed up inside. If the shroud comes in contact with any of his pals it transforms them into demons that will attack him. When the inevitable otherworldly tenure happens, Ash must wield one of the periodically appearing weapons (axe, sword or shovel) to smash the evil out of his friends. This goes on until Ash earns enough points to unlock 'The Book Of The Dead' and destroys the tome by tossing it into the inglenook at the foot of the screen.

During *The Evil Dead*'s conception Palace was also coding another horror game that was rumoured to be based on Carpenter's *Halloween* movie. But owing to the 'videogame nasty' campaign, started by Mary Whitehouse in 1984, this game was dropped mid-development, and its progress later moulded into *Cauldron*. Although *The Evil Dead* received an official C64 release, many distributors were hesitant to stock the game, fearing a backlash from concerned parents. This trepidation resulted in only a few thousand copies of the games ever finding their way on to shop shelves and even fewer into the homes of Commodore owners. But despite its paltry sales, Palace later found a cunning way to seep the game into more households when it bundled it as a free bonus game with Spectrum ports of *Cauldron*.

In 1980, Paramount Pictures kicked off a low-budget horror franchise about a group of sex-hungry camp co-ordinators menaced by a machete-wielding weak swimmer. Five years and three sequels later UK developer Domark tried to cash in on the franchise's popularity by releasing a game based on the movie.

Essentially, Domark's rendition of *Friday The 13th* is a virtual game of 'Wink Murder' but sprinkled with peculiar psyops scare techniques. Playing the role of one of five camp counsellors, it was your job to track and kill a prowling Jason before he kills all of your friends, and to make your mission more challenging Jason has the power to shape shift and take the form of any of the other counsellors in the game. The gameplay basically involved running around Crystal Lake holiday camp, or trying to draw everyone to the church using the ornate cross, wait for Jason to strike – when he'll then reveal his true form – and then pummel him a ridiculous amount of times with the deadly implements that were irresponsibly strewn around the campsite. To appease gore-hounds, Domark occasionally flashed up a macabre image of one of the peripheral characters' machete-wearing head and accompanied the unsettling image with a nasty heart-wincing digitised scream. Some versions of the game were also packed with peculiar foaming blood capsules, which players could chew on during play to pretend they were a vampire or something. And no stranger to running competitions with its games (see *Eureka!*, for example) Domark also ran a peculiar horror sound-effects competition with the game that gave five people





» Don't panic, she's only made of clay.

the chance to win a spanking new colour monitor by matching up ten cryptic clues printed in the inlay card with ten ridiculous sound effects they'd recorded at the end of the tape.

Four years later and Jason emerged once again, this time to slaver over NES owners. Released in 1989 by LJN Toys, the Nintendo version of *Friday The 13th* once again found players assuming the roles of one of the camp counsellors (there are six on offer here), but this time you could switch between them on the fly. In LJN's version the action is also slightly different, flipping between side-scrolling *Rush'N Attack*-style action for its outdoors sections, and a 3D *Monster Maze*-style viewpoint whenever the player enters any of the cabins.

As well as its action, LJN also added *Simon's Quest*-style night/day transitions to the gameplay, which saw enemies become more abundant, but not more powerful, at nightfall. To shovel a little tension into the game the player also had to listen out for alarms raised by fellow counsellors and children to signify that Jason was on the attack. Failure to hightail it over to the distressed cabin in the allotted time would see someone butchered, and the game ends when everyone is killed. While *Friday The 13th* is often criticised for being far too challenging, those who take the time to work out the pretty obvious game plan needed to topple Jason – rather than rushing in with both feet first – will probably find that the game can actually be quite rewarding. The knack to finishing the game is to try to keep everyone alive for as long as possible by using the more agile counsellors – those who run and jump faster – to venture out and collect supplies and weapons to dish out to the other counsellors. Also, tactically switching characters – rather than walking the entire length of the camp – is a great technique for reaching/controlling the counsellors in peril. This sense of working together to stop Jason is a ploy that's clearly used in the films, and it's cleverly re-created here.

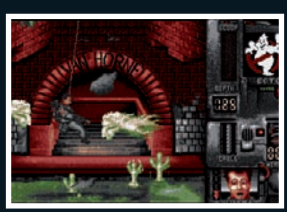
MAINSTREAM MATINEE

In the mid-Eighties we'd see horror flicks softened up to appeal to the mass market (ie kids and wimps). Ghostbusters and Gremlins, although never really out-and-out gore and horror extravaganzas, still found themselves going soft for their big-budget returns to the big screen, and their films would of course serve as perfect base material for equally parent-appeasing videogames. Even Disney got in on the action with its spider creeper, Arachnophobia…



Gremlins 2: The New Batch

The *Gremlins 2* franchise somehow found itself with an astonishing four videogame spin-offs. The first was a side-scrolling platformer by Elite that slotted you in the sensible loafers of blue-collar worker Billy Peltzer. Your mission was to negotiate five stages of Gremlin-infested skyscraper to save Gizmo, who's being tormented by his children. The second was an awful overhead puzzle/action game, in a similar vein to *Zombies Ate My Neighbours*, which was developed by Riedel Software. The most successful *Gremlins 2* game would appear on the NES, courtesy of SunSoft. Taking the viewpoint of top-down shooter, a popular perspective among NES movie games set in a skyscraper (see *Die Hard*, for example), the game plants you in the role of Gizmo as he shuffles around stages killing his misguided lizard-like children with tomatoes and matchsticks. The final game to come from the film was the festive-themed platformer *Gremlins: Stripe Vs Gizmo*. How it managed to avoid our Complete History Of Christmas Games feature back in issue 45 is a mystery, because it's by far the best Christmas-themed platformer about two competing puppets you'll ever find. (We're being sardonic by the way).



Ghostbusters II

Ghostbusters II found itself with several videogames after the film's release in 1989. Written by the Oliver Twins, and published by Activision, the most recognised title was a three-staged action game based on three key scenes from the film: collecting a slime specimen deep inside the New York sewer system, the ridiculous Statue of Liberty street parade, and the final showdown with an oil painting possessed by a maniacal overlord. *Ghostbusters II* also appeared in a truncated form on the Atari 2600, as a unique side-scrolling NES game that featured driving sections and even as a quirky top-down 'super deformed' Game Boy game. *Ghostbusters II* also received a PC-exclusive game that played like a collection of sub-games but with additional scenes – such as the Ghostbuster's courtroom clash with the Scalary Brothers and a bizarre level that found you springing your team from a mental institute.



Arachnophobia

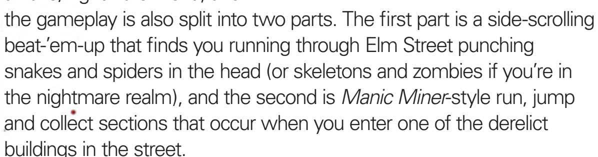
When a deadly spider from South Africa migrates to a suburb in California and starts sewing its oats among the local friendly neighbourhood spiders, the town becomes infested with the fanged menaces. It then falls to you, playing the eccentric exterminator Delbert McClintock, to eradiate all traces of the eight-legged vermin using bug spray and bug bombs. Blue Sky's *Arachnophobia* plays like an odd mix of the company's dual-screen shooter *Xenophobe* and David Crane's *Ghostbusters*. The overriding mission in the game is to locate and kill the queen spider that's hiding inside one of the 15 houses that make up each suburb. Despite its simplistic premise, *Arachnophobia* is pretty challenging. Your lumbering character feels purposely impassive and your paltry health bar – which takes the image of your character's fat-eroding face – can absorb only four hits before he drops to his knees and spiders start laying eggs in his head.



THE HISTORY OF VIDEOGAME NASTIES

By the mid-Eighties Western cinema was seeing yet another offshoot take shape from the horror genre – the comedy/horror film. Films such as *Night Of The Creeps*, *Monster Squad* and *The Lost Boys* came to represent the genre brilliantly, and even Freddy Krueger found himself getting a little bit of an image makeover – perhaps this is how he found himself gaining entry on one of the most kiddy-centric consoles of all time.

Realising that the NES wasn't really the type of vehicle to hawk a game about a disfigured child murderer who preys on kids in their dreams, LJN's videogame treatment of Wes Craven's classic *A Nightmare On Elm Street* found itself getting typically NESed up. *Nightmare On Elm Street* shares quite a few similarities with *Friday The 13th*. We see the return of the whole *Simon's Quest* night to day shift, but this time it's supplemented with a novel awake/nightmare world, and the gameplay is also split into two parts. The first part is a side-scrolling beat-'em-up that finds you running through Elm Street punching snakes and spiders in the head (or skeletons and zombies if you're in the nightmare realm), and the second is *Manic Miner*-style run, jump and collect sections that occur when you enter one of the derelict buildings in the street.



One of the earliest NES games to be developed by Rare, *A Nightmare On Elm Street* actually demonstrated a few novel gameplay ideas, such as levels that would randomly unlock upon boot-up, replacing the health with a sleep bar – therefore forcing the player to stay awake by avoiding enemy attacks and downing floating coffee mugs – and an innovative, but ultimately pointless, four-player co-op mode. Stretched across seven stages that take the player through three haunted houses, a maddening junkyard stage and Elm Street cemetery, the game's plot found you searching each level for Krueger's bones, with the intention of collecting them up and destroying them. Freddy, meanwhile, appeared in various disjointed, and not particularly menacing, guises at the end of each level to thwart your plight. The game eventually ends with a final standoff with a reanimated Krueger inside his house, quickly followed by a boss-rush section inside the high school, where you get to toss Krueger's remains into a furnace to finally finish the demonic caretaker off once and for all. Well, almost.



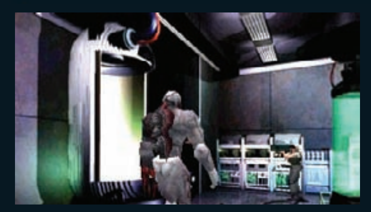
In 1989 Maverick Games and Westwood Associates – later Westwood Studios – released an odd *Gauntlet*-clone for the C64 and PC based on *A Nightmare On Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. While the game's stages seem to veer off on a bit of a bizarre tangent – Level 3 is set in a peculiar slime world, Level 5 looks like it takes place on the set of *Die Hard* and two levels are set inside a bizarre ice cavern – it actually plays things reasonably close to the movie. You get six characters to pick from each resembling the six kids in the film, and with their own unique powers. There's even a cameo from Freddy's mum, Amanda, who appears intermittently throughout the game to keep shopping in her son to you and boosting your character's health.

It was the third film that really began to portray Freddy as a bit of a loveable rogue, and this notion is certainly evident in Westwood's game. Freddy dishes out smug one-liners during the 'Game Over'



AND VICE VERSA

We've looked at games that have used horror films for inspiration, but what about the other way around? Given the number of times games have taken from cinema, it's no surprise that many films have been inspired by games…



Resident Evil

After dropping George A Romero's script after direction disputes, Paul Anderson's glossy interpretation of Capcom's perennial survival-horror franchise blazed its own cinematic trail. Those expecting a grimy zombie action film would be in for a shock. Anderson would place familiar S.T.A.R.S. operatives Jill and Chris with a new protagonist yet to make an appearance in any of the games. Anderson, however, would permeate his picture with some scrapings of fan service. Most notably, paying homage to *Resident Evil 2*'s train skirmish, and in the film's ending, which gave a telling nod to the appearance of the Nemesis, plus the Umbrella Corporation unleashing the T-Virus out into Raccoon City.



Silent Hill

Christophe Gans' big-screen adaptation of Konami's prolific survival-horror franchise is often touted as being the best stab at translating a videogame franchise to date, and it certainly feels like a cut above the rest. Gans was reputedly a huge fan of the games and pleaded with Konami to let him shoot the picture. The film captures the ashen and hellish environments of *Silent Hill* perfectly, and it also borrows plenty of themes from the games – a mother looking for her lost daughter, the idea that Silent Hill is a place of purgatory, faceless nurses, Pyramid Head and a mind-bending finale that features a grotesque deformed monstrosity, typical of the type of beastie you have to face at the end of the games.



House Of The Dead

The fact that the IMDB plot summary for this film states "a group of teens arrive on an island for a rave, only to discover the island has been taken over by zombies" should provide a warning shot as to how bad this film really is. Making a bit of a mockery of the *HOTD* franchise, Uwe Boll did away with the game's special investigators making a house visit to a maniacal doctor tale, for a bizarre story about a group of debased revellers looking to get wasted on a remote island only to find said island is teeming with zombies. Cue 90 minutes of banality.



Alone In The Dark

A year after the release of *House Of The Dead*, Uwe was at it again, this time with a cinematic reboot of one of the great-granddaddies of the survival-horror genre. Casting Christian Slater in the shoes of paranormal detective-cum-free-running martial arts superhero Edward Carnby (well it's how he's depicted in this movie), the story – which seems to have something to do with a civil servant using orphans to open a gateway to an evil world – is incoherent, and the set pieces are so ridiculous they actually make John Woo films look subtle. It hasn't stopped the film getting a sequel though. Apparently Carnby will be teaming up with a band of witch hunters to take on a maniacal witch.

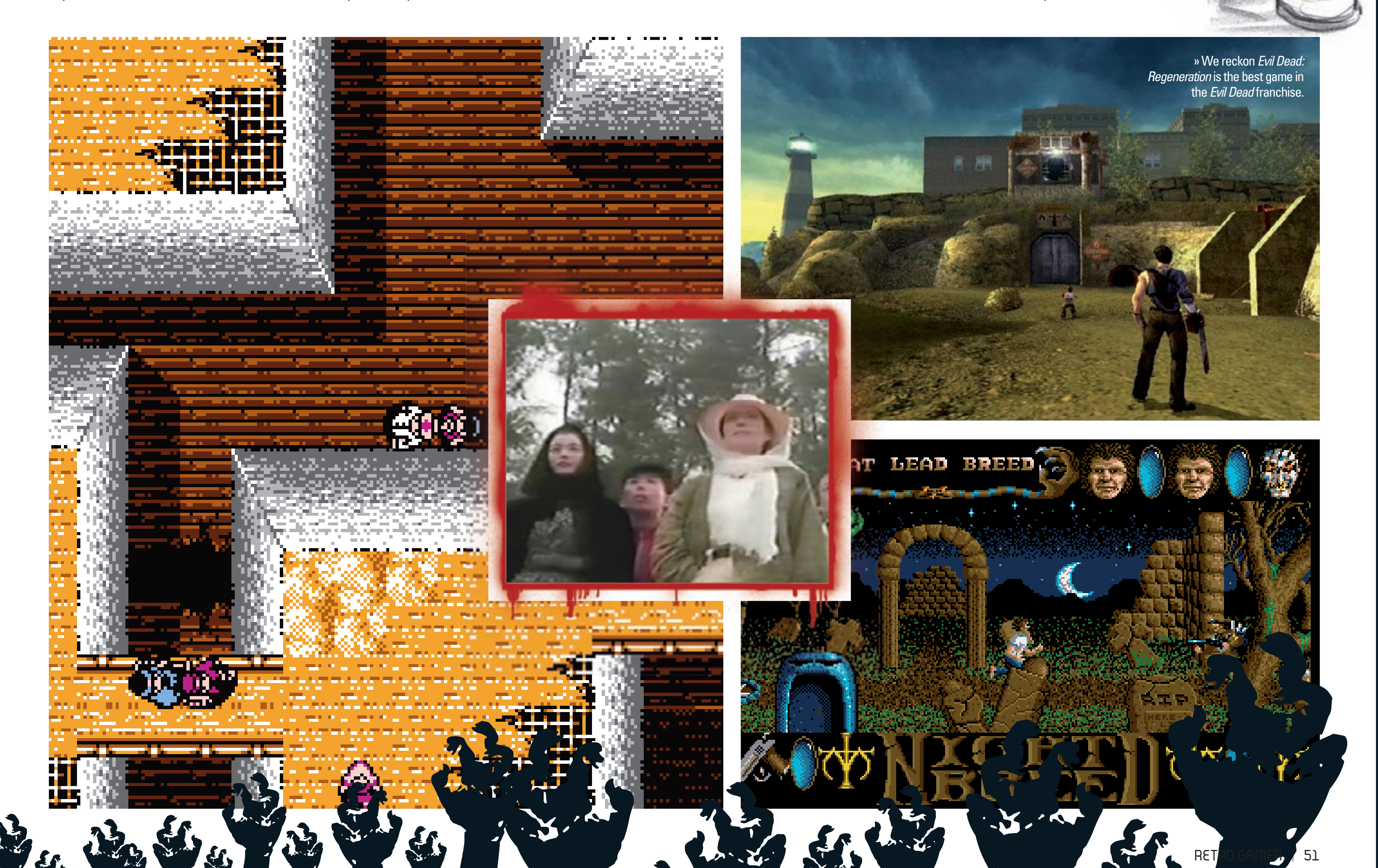
screen, manifests a ridiculous army of enemies – wheelchairs, snowmen and evil rugs – and he often annoyingly teleports you into danger and materialises out of thin air to administer a cheap attack. But to help even the score, the levels are fitted with vending machines selling power-ups (coffee), pistol ammo, grenades, daggers and even a chainsaw. If you manage to fend off Krueger's minions and reach the end of the game, you'll face him in his boiler room where he'll take on the same snake-like form he did at the end of the film.

Released in 1988, *Fright Night* was another studio sleeper hit. Boasting a teen and vampire mix, it's argued that the film forged the whole teen/horror film genre Wes Craven later tapped into with his successful *Scream* franchise. And owing to the unprecedented success of the picture – it was one of the highest grossing horror films on its year of release – licensing deals flooded in, and a computer game was duly made and released on the Amiga and Atari ST. Set inside an exquisite and wonderfully ornate looking mansion, you play the role of Jerry Dandridge, a vampire opportunist who's trying to gorge on the necks of his poor neighbours before daybreak. To stop his plight the bipedal blood banks will toss crucifixes, garlic and bibles at you. While the game shines in both visuals and sound, sadly *Fright Night* lacked any sense of real depth to hold interest, and as a result passed by generally unnoticed on its release. With some truly gorgeous looking visuals to gawp at, courtesy of revered Atari programming wizard Steve Bak, *Fright Night*'s gameplay ultimately proved shallower than *Hellraiser*'s paddling pool.

A year later Capcom had its first stab at the survival-horror game. Often touted as being the first true survival-horror game, *Sweet Home* was a top-down adventure game for the Famicom that only found a release in Japan. Licensed from a movie of the same name, both game and movie were released concurrently.

The filmic incarnation of *Sweet Home* (*Suito Homu*) was directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa (*Pulse*) and follows a very similar plot to the Robert Wise classic *The Haunting*. Both film and videogame chart the exploits of a group of reporters who enter a haunted mansion to film the restoration of a painting that hangs inside the house. However, it transpires that one of the paintings – depicting a young child burning inside a furnace – seems to be connected to an evil spirit residing inside the halls of the mansion. The game retells the events of the film and shares a great many parallels with its seminal descendant *Resident Evil*. In fact, *Resident Evil*'s creator, Shinji Mikami, has admitted on several occasions that *Sweet Home* was the direct inspiration for his 1996 horror classic, and it clearly shows. There's *Sweet Home*'s mansion setting for starters and the fact that when you start the game the five protagonists split up and tier off into two separate groups. Puzzles also play a big part in the gameplay, and because of a liberal inventory you're continually forced to juggle items and weapons.

But as a game in its own right, *Sweet Home* employs a few neat tricks of its own. The puzzles tend to be practical and logical in feel (no concocting potent pesticides to take out a giant weed or slotting diamonds into the eye sockets of a gold statue of a tiger). Upon entering the mansion at the beginning of the game, the player is quickly introduced to their party of five and learns that each member has their own unique skill that will prove essential to negotiating the rooms of the mansion. *Sweet Home*'s puzzles also involve using objects believably, like shining a torch to clear a doorway from darkness or using a lighter to burn a rope and expose a hidden exit, and the game's battle system is also of particular note. Enemy encounters in the game are random and when your team runs into one of the mansion's gruesome abominations the game's perspective switches from an overhead to a first-person *Phantasy Star*-style battle screen. It's here that the player, using a list of attack options and spells, must take it in turns with the creature to launch their attacks. Death is also very



» We reckon *Evil Dead: Regeneration* is the best game in the *Evil Dead* franchise.

THE HISTORY OF VIDEOGAME NASTIES

SCARIEST MOMENTS IN GAMING

We asked readers over on our forum to fess up and reveal which videogame scares have caused them to go to bed with the lights on, lock all the doors and sleep with a hunting rifle under their bed. Here's a few examples of some of gaming's greatest scares…

Opa-Opa
The first time that dog burst through the window in *Resident Evil*…
That did make me jump.

PantalOOns
Alone In The Dark, played in the dark, when the spinny ball ghost thing chases you and makes a horrible noise. Soundblaster goodness!

ShadowMan
The Octobrains from *Duke Nukem 3D* just freak me out, the weird 'singing' they do when you shoot them really sends shivers down my spine. Can't play *Duke Nukem 3D* now because of the damn things.

TheDude18
Resident Evil 4 has some great moments, my favourite being going up the hill towards the church after you've killed the big monster in the lake. As you get near the church some thunder claps kick in as the lightning lights up just enough of the play area for you to make out about three pairs of red eyes. As you get closer you can hear the snarls of the dogs waiting for you.

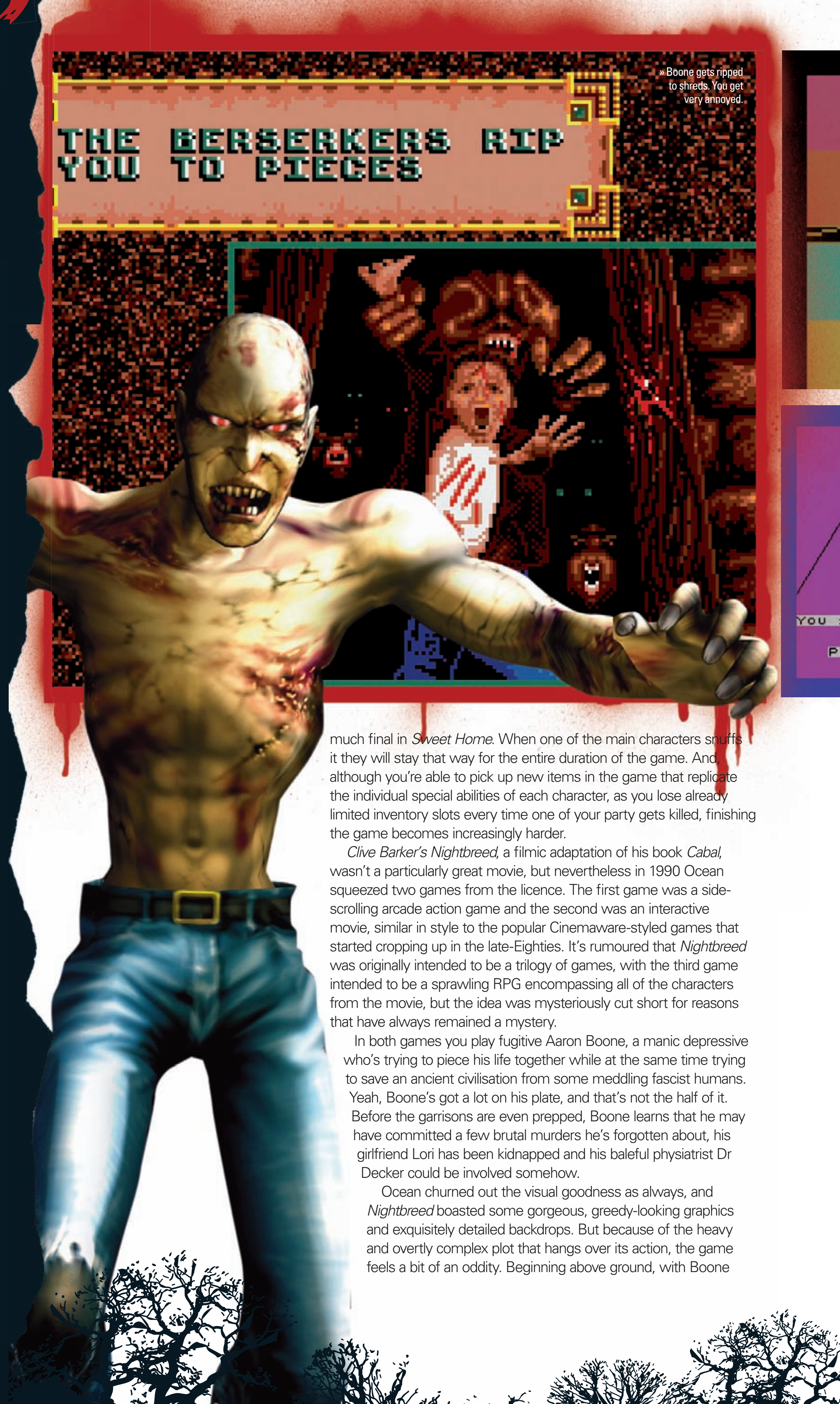
Smurph
Doom on the PSone. First time I hooked it up to my stereo, I turned the lights off, cranked up the volume and pooed my pants. Brilliant.

Chinnico
Alien on the C64. I'm driven crazy by being pursued and forced to act without time to think and on limited, rapidly dropping resources. That's why *Alien Vs. Predator* on the PC is one of the scariest games I've ever played. I never managed to play it for more than one hour per session though.

Team Alfie
Sweet Home was pretty spine-tingling for a Famicom game. You know you're in for a bad time when you're trapped in a mansion with the malevolent spirit of a mother seeking to avenge the death of her child.

Monkey_Puzzle
In *Gribbly's Day Out* when all the force fields come down and that black spider monster thing comes after you.

Dewin
Half-Life – the first time I got into an air duct, moody and dark, and a head crab jumped up at me… god I hated those things…



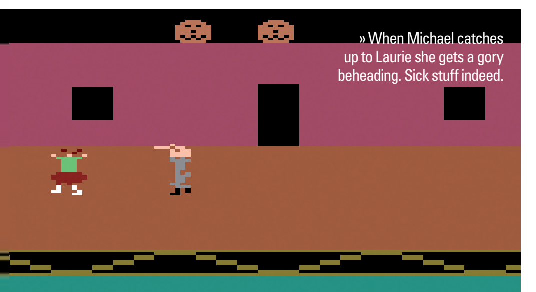
» Boone gets ripped to shreds. You get very annoyed.

much final in *Sweet Home*. When one of the main characters snuffs it they will stay that way for the entire duration of the game. And, although you're able to pick up new items in the game that replicate the individual special abilities of each character, as you lose already limited inventory slots every time one of your party gets killed, finishing the game becomes increasingly harder.

Clive Barker's Nightbreed, a filmic adaptation of his book *Cabal*, wasn't a particularly great movie, but nevertheless in 1990 Ocean squeezed two games from the licence. The first game was a side-scrolling arcade action game and the second was an interactive movie, similar in style to the popular Cinemaware-styled games that started cropping up in the late-Eighties. It's rumoured that *Nightbreed* was originally intended to be a trilogy of games, with the third game intended to be a sprawling RPG encompassing all of the characters from the movie, but the idea was mysteriously cut short for reasons that have always remained a mystery.

In both games you play fugitive Aaron Boone, a manic depressive who's trying to piece his life together while at the same time trying to save an ancient civilisation from some meddling fascist humans. Yeah, Boone's got a lot on his plate, and that's not the half of it. Before the garrisons are even prepped, Boone learns that he may have committed a few brutal murders he's forgotten about, his girlfriend Lori has been kidnapped and his baleful physiatrist Dr Decker could be involved somehow.

Ocean churned out the visual goodness as always, and *Nightbreed* boasted some gorgeous, greedy-looking graphics and exquisitely detailed backdrops. But because of the heavy and overtly complex plot that hangs over its action, the game feels a bit of an oddity. Beginning above ground, with Boone



» When Michael catches up to Laurie she gets a gory beheading. Sick stuff indeed.



» *Texas Chainsaw*'s graphics are so bad, they make *South Park* look like *Akira*.

THE DAWN OF SURVIVAL HORROR?



Many gamers regard Capcom's *Sweet Home* as being the first example of the survival-horror game, but we at **Retro Gamer** aren't so sure. Not forgetting classics like *Monster Maze* and *Ant Attack*, one of the earliest examples of a game using fear to heighten immersion was a simple little single-screen game called *Hunt The Wumpus*. Written by Gregory Yob in 1981 and published by Texas Instruments, *Hunt The Wumpus* found players negotiating randomly generating caves to find and slay a Grendel-type monster with a penchant for human flesh. Negotiating game grids plotted out on the vertices of a dodecahedron, it was the player's job to decipher which cavern the deadly Wumpus was dozing in and end his reign of terror with a single arrow blast. Guess wrong and it's into the Wumpus's sharp maws you go. While today *Hunt The Wumpus* is likely to raise a wry smile, having to rely on intellect and an ounce of luck to track the Wumpus made for a pretty tense experience back in its day. If you want to experience the nerve-shredding terror for yourself take a trip to http://tatsusoft.diregames.net/wumpus.html where you'll find a version of the game you can download for your PC.

avoiding the firepower of a neo-Nazi organisation known as The Sons Of The Free, the game quickly descends deep into the catacombs and antechambers of the hellish world of Midian. It's here Boone must do battle with the Nightbreed (who are oblivious to the fact that he's actually trying to save them), meet a god, fight a sinister sock-faced character known as the Mask and save his woman.

The interactive movie, meanwhile, takes a more cinematic slant to its action, and is all the better for it. Cherry-picking key scenes from the movie, this interactive retelling succeeds in serving up some genuinely tense gameplay moments. The main crux of the game involves the player essentially relying on trial and error to interlace cut-scenes together in the correct order. This is occasionally permeated with short and infamously frustrating sub-games and notoriously taxing interactive action set pieces. Suffice to say, its cocktail of trial and error and frustrating gameplay meant many people didn't get very far into game. *Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie* was beautifully presented though, and its gameplay is laced with this peculiar air of dread that captures the macabre tone of the movie well.

It was a whole decade before another videogame took direct inspiration from a horror movie. Rejuvenated by Capcom's *Resident Evil* franchise, the survival-horror genre was fast growing in popularity and by the early-Nineties developers were beginning to experiment with the formula. Games such as *Nightmare Creatures*, *Blue Stinger* and even *Castlevania* adopted a more free-roaming approach to their action, and in their wake THQ released a PSone 3D hack-'n'-slash survival-horror game based on the *Evil Dead* franchise. Set eight years after the events of *Army Of Darkness*, *Evil Dead: Hail To The King* played out like a spiritual sequel to the film. Put-upon shop clerk Ashley Williams is once again called back to the godforsaken cabin to clean up after his detached hand manages to free the deadites from the pages of 'The Book Of The Dead'. The game's budget sequel, *A Fistful Of Boomstick*, released in 1993, retained the anarchic hack-'n'-smash formula, but added spells to Ash's attack repertoire, the freedom to save the game at any point, and bonus challenges to eke a bit of replay value from the game.

While the 3D *Evil Dead* games would never scoop an award for technical advancement, there was a sense that THQ was trying to improve the series with each release. *Evil Dead: Regeneration* is the last instalment in the *Evil Dead* series, and captures the irreverent and slapstick nature of the films brilliantly. Ignoring the events of *Army Of Darkness*, *Regeneration* picks up at the end of *Evil Dead II* and is seen as an alternative tendril of the *Evil Dead* story. After the police discover the dismembered bodies of the deadites in local woods, Ash finds himself the prime suspect for the murders and is locked up in an insane asylum. Predictably, it doesn't take long for hell's denizens to catch up with him and set the wheels in motion for another gory throwaway jaunt. The *Evil Dead* films tend to end on a downer (yes we're discounting the theatrical cut of *Army Of Darkness*). And while we don't want to ruin the endings of either the films or videogames for you, we will say the games certainly continued that tradition.

With studios now looking to videogame franchises for potential blockbusters (see 'And Vice Versa' boxout on page 50) rather than the other way around, it seems that horror films and videogames are inexorably linked. It's a relationship that really comes to express the commercial shift the videogame industry has taken in two decades. The fact that it's no longer seen as a hobby, or simply a peculiar money-making sideline to the film industry, but now a virtual portent respected and used by other forms of media.



SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW



RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT SOME OF THE CLASSIC FRANCHISES THAT ARE BEING REVIVED FOR NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEMS. THIS MONTH WE SPEAK TO BIZARRE CREATIONS ABOUT ITS LATEST GEOMETRY WARS GAME

Game Title: Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2
System: Xbox Live Arcade
Interviewee: Stephen Cakebread, senior coder, Bizarre Creations

Retro Gamer: How long did *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2* take to create?
Stephen Cakebread: *Retro Evolved 2*'s development started almost straight after we shipped the original *Retro Evolved*. To be honest, the early work was on and off for about six months as I worked on other stuff simultaneously. Then it was about another six months where we worked full-time on the game, completing the game modes and adding the necessary polish to get to launch.

RG: Any problems along the way?
SC: The main bulk of the development was remarkably smooth, as we had a good idea of what we wanted to build at a very early stage. Probably the toughest thing to get right was the actual visual style. *Retro Evolved 2* needed to have the same sort of style as its daddy, but with that new visual 'edge' to set it apart from the older game. It took a lot of trial and error to get that right…

RG: How much pressure do you feel when working on a sequel like *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2*?
SC: Lots! After the first game did so well critically (which we weren't expecting), we set ourselves an incredibly high bar with the sequel. We're our own biggest critics, and *Retro Evolved 2* needed to meet our own very high standards before it got released.

RG: Why did you decide to include numerous game modes this time around?
SC: The game modes served a very specific purpose. We wanted to broaden the gameplay of the original *Retro Evolved*, but not change it completely. It still needed to 'feel' like *Geometry Wars*. Therefore the six game modes were engineered to be six different takes on the original gameplay instead of one big, giant, different game.

We looked at combining all the changes into one big new uber game mode, but to make this balance correctly it called for some pretty sweeping changes. It was at that point where it stopped 'feeling' like *Geometry Wars*. The six modes allowed changes to the formula, which weren't so dramatic.

RG: The sense of progression in *Retro Evolved 2* is fantastic, surely it's a very difficult thing to get right?
SC: We went through several different unlocking ideas, but I really liked the way that *Brain Training* on the DS unlocked its features. You gained new stuff just from playing the game… it wasn't necessary to do really well. You got rewarded just for playing it.

An unlock structure like this promotes gamers to learn each game mode properly, and understand it well, before moving on to the next one. If there was no unlock structure then people would jump around and not 'get' each mode before attempting the harder one. Given that each mode is built on the knowledge that the user gained in the previous, this would be catastrophic.

RG: Did you have any ideas for the game that never made the final cut?
SC: One of the game modes that didn't make it was a air-hockey style thing, with gravity wells as goals. It was good fun, but it didn't have the same depth as the other modes and was ultimately not included in the final product.

RG: How much thought went into the game's Achievements and which do you feel is the toughest?
SC: We were thinking about Achievements all the way through the game's development. To be honest though, we didn't sit down and implement them in detail until the rest of the gameplay was in place. This was because we were constantly chopping and changing the core mechanics of the game, and didn't want to build additional features on top of the core stuff if it might get cut in the next build.

Smile is probably the toughest Achievement, as it requires an ability to play Sequence in a different way. Bearing in mind this is probably the most challenging mode in the game it makes Smile a tough one to obtain.

RG: With so many Xbox Live Arcade games now using the old 'one stick to fire, one stick to move' technique, do you ever get worried that people will just think, 'great, here comes another one'?
SC: Well, it's just a control method. It's the actual game mechanics that people should look at… if they change and innovate then I don't think it'll be a problem. After all, people don't complain about the control method in first-person shooters or racing games being the same. Generally people complain when the controls aren't what they've come to expect in other games!

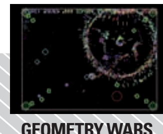
RG: You obviously have a big affinity for the shoot-'em-up genre. Ever thought of making something a little more conventional (such as *R-Type* and *1942*)?
SC: We have talked about it. Craig (games manager at Bizarre) is a huge shoot-'em-up fan, so there could possibly be potential to do something like that in the future. Maybe.

RG: Do you think the franchise would have been as successful if it had never first appeared in *Project Gotham Racing*?
SC: I think *PGR* definitely gave the game mindshare with the hardcore, but I don't think it necessarily helped in terms of sales. I think the bigger deal for us was to be there at the Live Arcade launch. It was a case of the right game at the right time, with the right quality to be recognised from the crowd.

RG: Why do you think the *Geometry Wars* series is so popular with gamers?
SC: It's a quick, easy to pick up, bite-sized game with a hardcore bent to it. Most 'casual' games are orientated to a casual audience, so the gameplay is easy to get into but it might not be very deep. *Geometry Wars* tends to have the advantages of casual games, but with a strong hardcore, competitive layer underneath that. I think most gamers like that…

RG: How would you like *Retro Evolved 2* to be remembered by gamers?
SC: I haven't given much thought to how they might remember it. I just hope they enjoy it while they play!





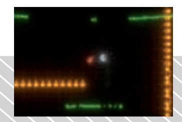
GEOMETRY WARS
Year Released: 2003
Featured Version: Xbox



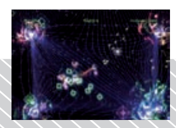
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED
Year Released: 2005
Featured Version: Xbox 360



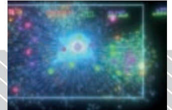
GEOMETRY WARS: EVOLVED
Year Released: 2006
Featured version: Mobile



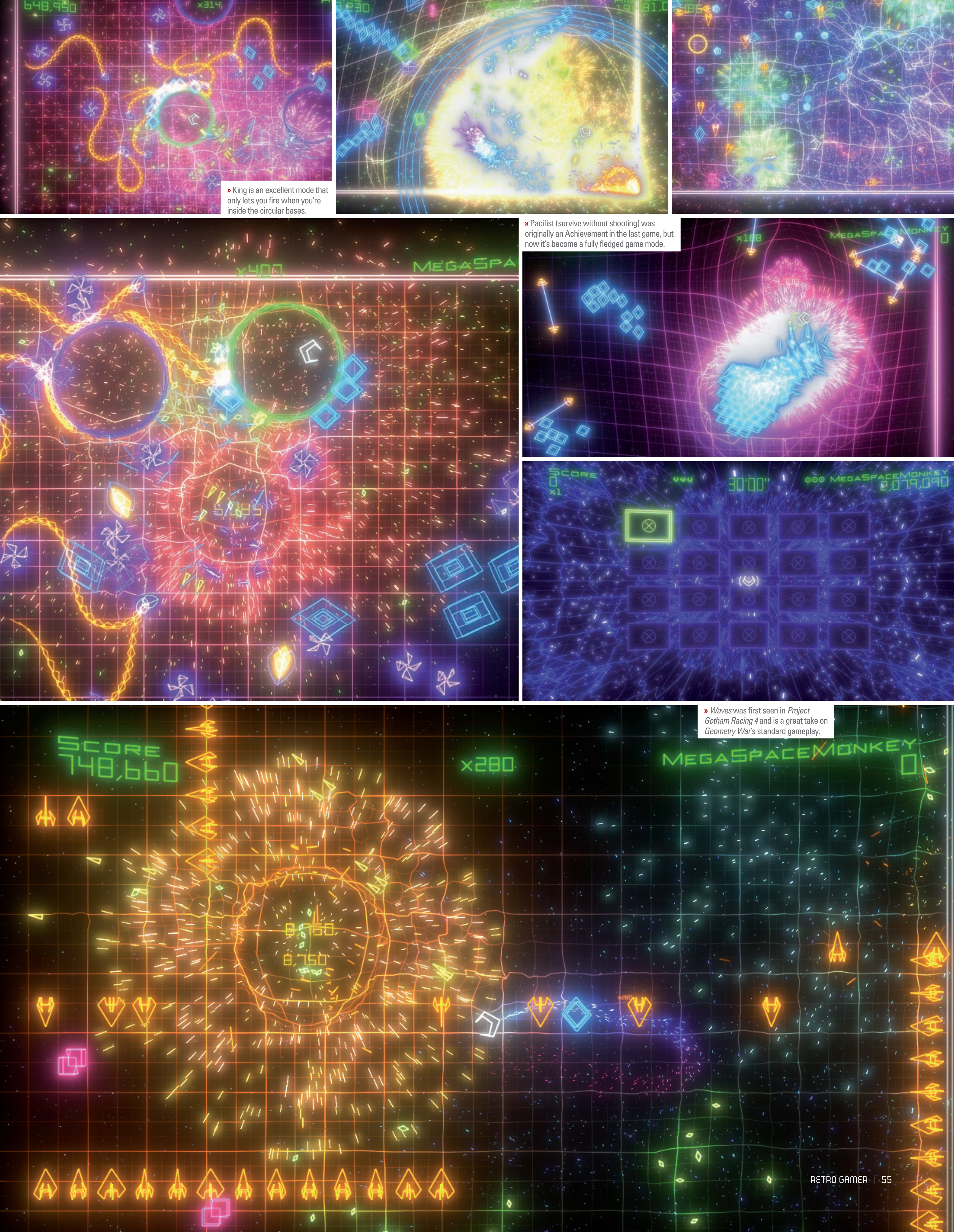
GEOMETRY WARS: WAVES
Year Released: 2007
Featured Version: Xbox 360



GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES
Year Released: 2007
Featured Version: Wii



GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2
Year Released: 2008
Featured Version: Xbox 360



» King is an excellent mode that only lets you fire when you're inside the circular bases.

» Pacifist (survive without shooting) was originally an Achievement in the last game, but now it's become a fully fledged game mode.

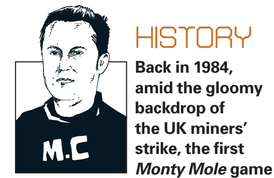
» *Waves* was first seen in *Project Gotham Racing 4* and is a great take on *Geometry War*'s standard gameplay.

WANTED: MONTY MOLE

DOWN IN THE MOLE HOLE



- » **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** FLIP-SCREEN PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1 +



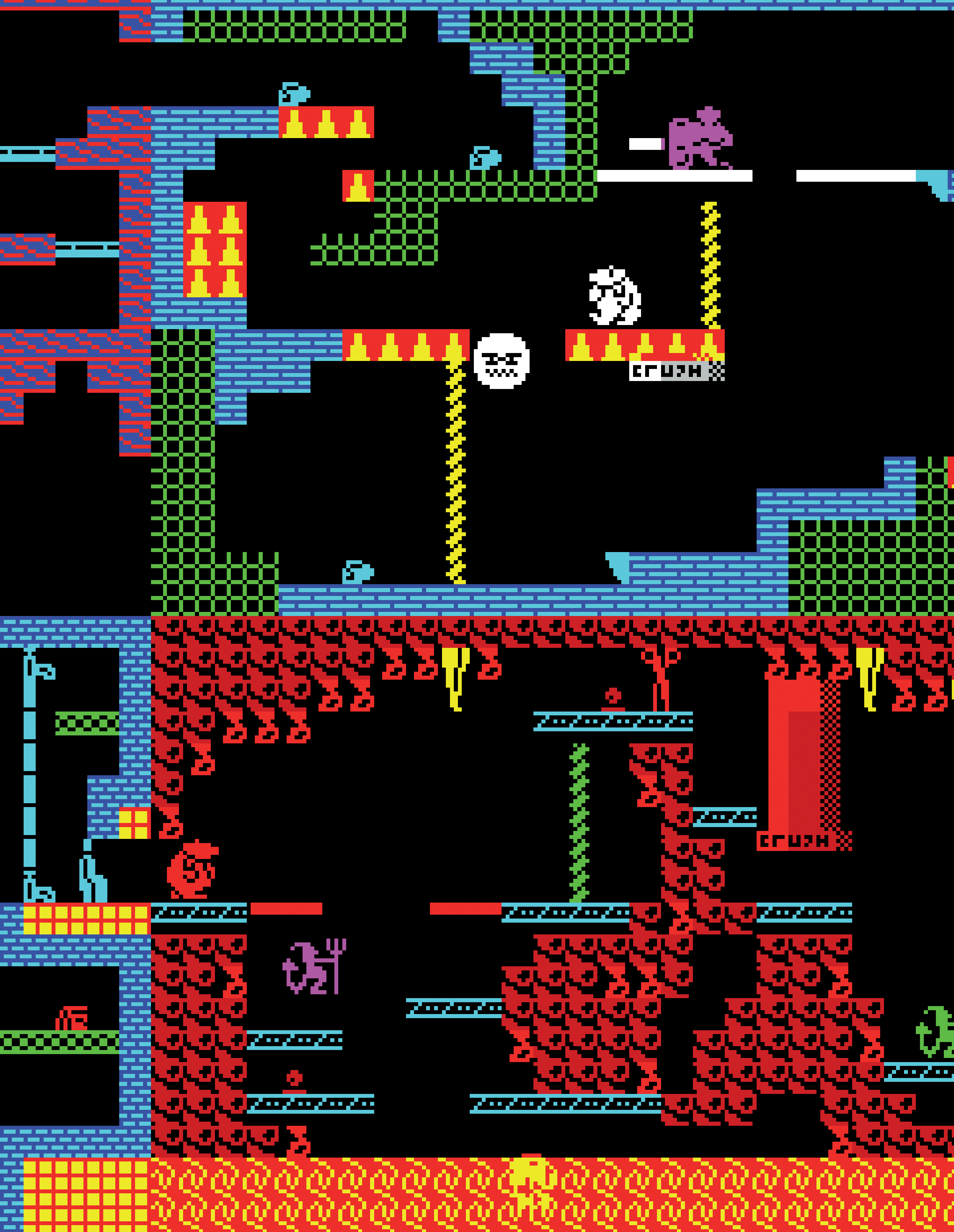
HISTORY

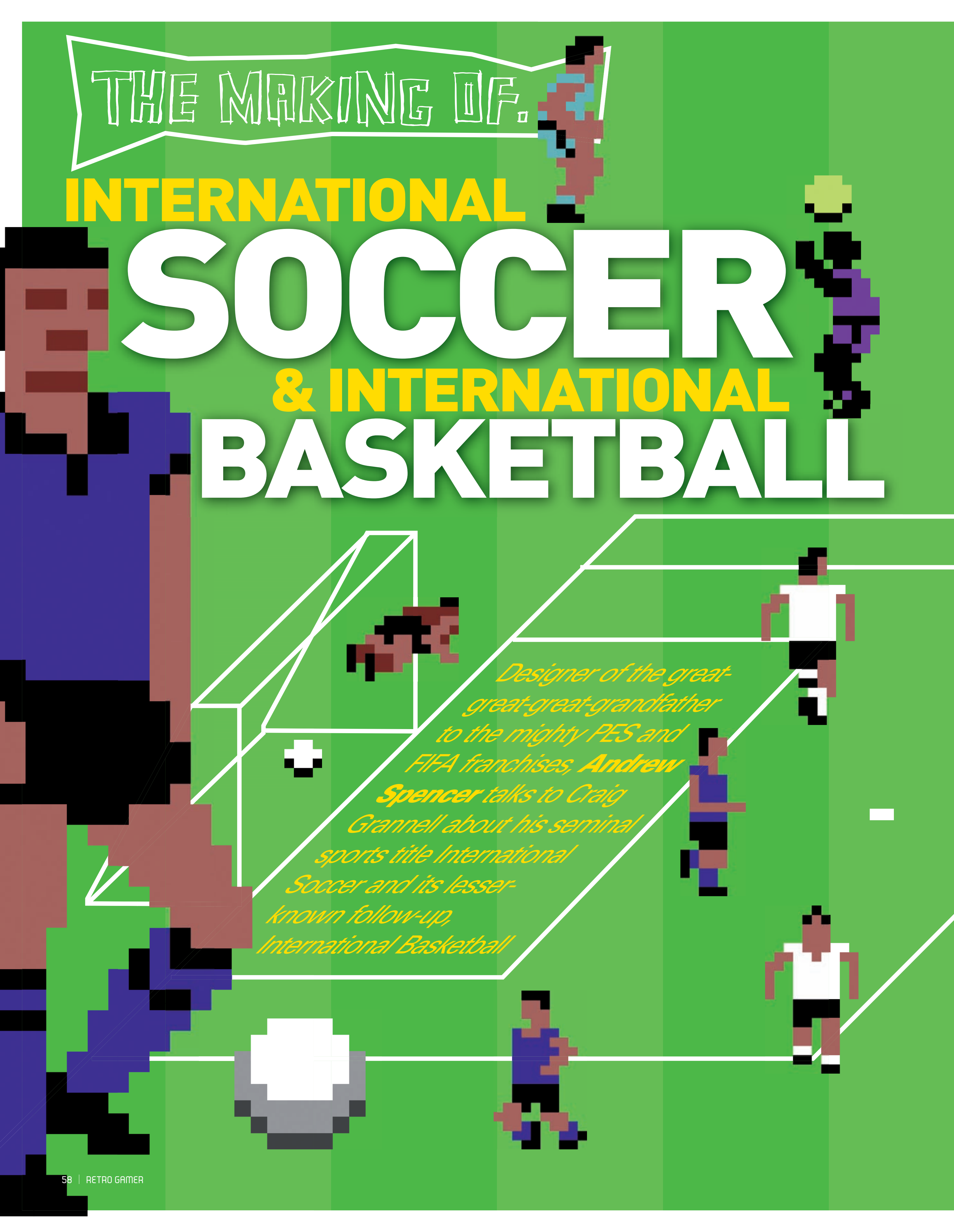
Back in 1984, amid the gloomy backdrop of the UK miners' strike, the first *Monty Mole* game made the TV news thanks to its backstory about a desperate 'scab' mole and its caricature of union boss Arthur Scargill. Although the press exposure certainly shot *Monty Mole* (and developer Gremlin) to fame, the game didn't need to rely on timely gimmicks, as it was a great little platformer in its own right.

At first glance it didn't appear to offer anything new. You progressed through a series of underground caverns, dodging nasties and grabbing collectables. It was very quirky, very British, and very *Manic Miner*. But the further you descended down t'pit, the more surprises you'd find. There were crushers that would squash Monty flat and platforms that snap open and shut. Further down in the depths were mine carts on which Monty could hitch a ride. The game also introduced puzzle elements where you had to collect certain objects in a certain order to move onto the next screen. It all worked brilliantly well and was the perfect substitute for *Manic Miner* fans who weren't taken with the open sprawl of *Jet Set Willy*.

If you were a Commodore owner then the image on the right may look unfamiliar. That's because the Speccy version was written by Peter Harrap, while Tony Crowther was responsible for the C64 version. Despite being developed in tandem, the two programmers turned in quite different games, with Crowther opting for scrolling graphics instead of Harrap's flip-screen approach. However, it's the superior Spectrum version that laid the foundations for the series, as Harrap followed it up with the classic double of *Monty On The Run* and *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*.

The *Monty Mole* series deserves much more coverage than can be afforded in this slither of text, but Harrap has seemingly gone to ground and I've been unable to contact him despite repeated attempts. If you just happen to be reading this, Peter, please get in touch with **RG**. We'd love to unearth the full story behind our favourite monocle-wearing mole.


CRUSH
CRUSH



THE MAKING OF:

INTERNATIONAL SOCCER & INTERNATIONAL BASKETBALL

*Designer of the great-great-great-grandfather to the mighty PES and FIFA franchises, **Andrew Spencer** talks to Craig Grannell about his seminal sports title International Soccer and its lesser-known follow-up, International Basketball*



» Andrew Spencer during his time at Epyx, where he developed *Street Sports Basketball*.

THE MAKING OF: INTERNATIONAL SOCCER AND INTERNATIONAL BASKETBALL

» [C64] At the end of the game, the captain retrieves the cup, gets the girl and lives happily ever after.

Andrew now works part-time at a University but he's still planning his next title.

"INTERNATIONAL SOCCER'S FEATURES MOSTLY ARRIVED VIA A MIXTURE OF EXPERIMENTATION AND TECHNICAL BARRIERS"

I was never much of a football fan. When we had to play football at school I used to avoid the ball as much as possible and chat with my equally unsporty mates at the edge of the pitch." Not what you'd expect to hear from the mastermind behind one of the most important and influential sports games of the Eighties, but these are nonetheless the words of Andrew Spencer, creator of Commodore's *International Soccer* and its pseudo-sequel *International Basketball*.

Suitably, what with Andrew's most successful game being linked to the Commodore 64, it was an earlier Commodore machine that fired his imagination and got him into programming. Although he'd done a quick-fire Fortran programming course while at Cambridge University, the PET offered a screen and rudimentary graphics. This appealed to visual thinker Andrew, who subsequently went halves on a PET with a friend. "We took it in turns to keep it at our respective homes," recalls Andrew. "I wrote spaceship fighting games in BASIC, but these ran slowly… until I discovered machine code. I remember the moment, writing machine code on my PET, when I thought 'this is what I want to do'."

Andrew soon got his chance. After briefly flirting with commercial gaming via a contract with Commodore for two PET games, he began working on business software as interest in the PET dwindled due to the VIC-20's arrival. But a meeting with Gail Wellington at Commodore's Slough offices reversed his fortunes. "She asked if I was the 'Andrew Spencer who writes games'," he says. "When I said yes, she asked if I knew anything about soccer. I said 'no, but I could write you a football game', and *International Soccer* was born."

Few football games existed at the time – a couple of risible efforts lurked on the Atari 2600, and *Intellivision Soccer* was doing the rounds. "Sometime before I was asked to write *International Soccer* I saw the Intellivision game, but I can't remember if I played it, or just watched others playing," says Andrew. "I was very much influenced by what I saw when I came to make *International Soccer*, but maybe just seeing it once meant I didn't try to follow it too closely."

In the end, the camera-style viewpoint from Intellivision's game most impacted on Andrew's creation. Subsequent components and features mostly arrived via a mixture of experimentation and technical barriers. For example, the game's seven-a-side teams are down to the C64's sprite limitations. "I used one of the eight hardware sprites for the ball, leaving seven for the players," recalls Andrew. "An interrupt trick enabled me to reuse the same sprite for a player

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** COMMODORE
- » **DEVELOPER:** ANDREW SPENCER
- » **RELEASED:** 1983 (SOCCER), 1985 (BASKETBALL)
- » **PLATFORMS:** COMMODORE 64
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+

» Sketches of *International Soccer's* sprite drawings, showing some of the players' movements.

» [C64] Commodore wanted more excitement when a goal was scored, hence the scarf-waving graphics and 'white noise' cheering sound.

» [C64] The goalie decided that lying face down in the mud was a fitting response to missing such an easy shot.

BASKETBALL PIRACY



Andrew Spencer aficionados are probably aware that there are two versions of *International Basketball*, one of which has a distinctly less polished feel and a very different crowd and advertising hoardings. "The game with a green court is an unfinished version that was pirated before the official release," says Andrew, noting that the adverts are different because he put Coca-Cola and Kellogg's trademarks there to show Commodore the possibilities for selling ad space. "In the end, no deals were made, and the brands were replaced by the Compunet logo and a 'Jonny's For Funk' ad – Jonny being a friend of mine who liked funk, which seemed to go well with the black American connections of basketball." The original crowd, including empty seats and men wearing suits, was apparently considered 'too British'.

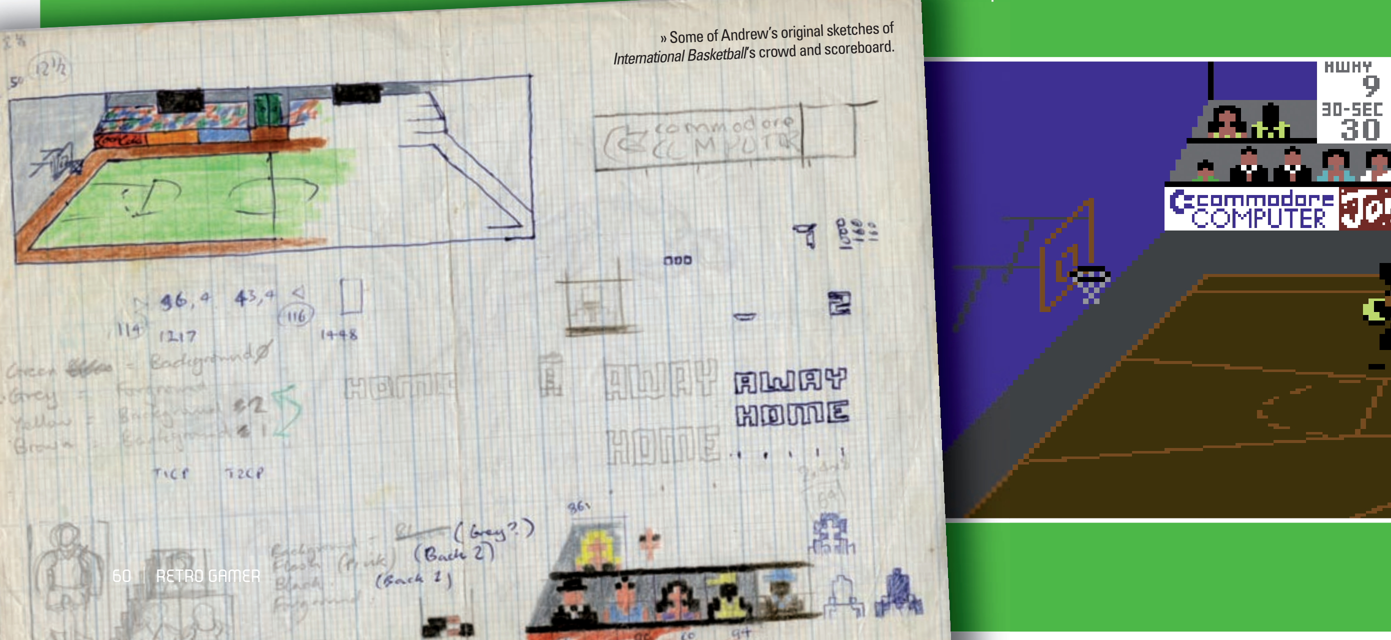
"Incidentally, when I say pirated, I think I was the author of my own misfortune," says Andrew. "While working on the game, I visited the local computer club. One week I gave a copy of the latest version of *International Basketball* to some enthusiasts on the understanding it would go no further. Looking back, it seems unbelievably stupid – they didn't have eye patches and parrots on their shoulders, but the fact they gave me a ripped-off copy of a text-to-speech program should have told me something. I can't say for certain, but it seems likely this was the source of the green-court version."

near the top of the the screen and then again for one lower down so that I could have more than seven players visible at once, and I then ensured the teams had a tendency to spread out. Occasionally, though, a player 'tears' as the game tries to use a sprite to draw two players without enough vertical separation."

For the game's controls, experimentation was more significant than technology, and the available moves evolved as Andrew played the game. First, the player could just kick the ball by going near it and pressing the fire button. Then, the ball 'stuck' to the player's foot, enabling dribbling. Next, the stickiness was reduced, making tackles possible. "For a long time, players could run off the top or bottom of the screen and disappear into the further reaches of their virtual world, often never to return," says Andrew. "When I fixed this and added throw-ins, goal kicks and corners, it got a bit complicated because I wanted all the other players to keep running about while a set piece was going on."

This attention to detail also materialised in other areas of the game. Instead of just switching the players at half-time, Andrew took the trouble to make them run into the tunnel and come back out again – something he says "gave a few moments of anticipation before the second half". And after a request from Commodore to make an event out of winning, an award ceremony was created where a woman hands the winning team's captain a gold cup. "I always liked that," says Andrew. "It gave the winner a pat on the back and rubbed the loser's nose in it! At the same time, it was somewhat quaint and provided a little female interest in an otherwise male game."

Perhaps the most impressive element of *International Soccer*, though, is that it plays a decent one-player game – unusual for a C64 game from 1983. "The AI was the most demanding part of making the game, but also the most fun, and so it didn't seem like hard work," reveals Andrew. "It was fun because



» Some of Andrew's original sketches of *International Basketball*'s crowd and scoreboard.





» [C64] Andrew worked on *Street Sports Basketball* for Epyx, a pretty but slow update to *International Basketball* that also ditched many of the game's rules.

» [Spectrum] Jon Ritman's *Match Day* was largely written due to Spectrum games publishers wanting a Speccy equivalent of *International Soccer.*

» [C64] The weirdest *International Soccer* hack, for fans of *Orson's Farm*/*U.S. Acres* only.

it was like bringing the players to life, which is what I've always wanted to do with computers." Andrew notes that to make the computer good enough, the AI had to anticipate where the ball or the human player was going: "That was the hard part. It's not enough to run straight at the ball or dribbling player – you have to aim where it will probably be in a few moments. This would be fairly easy to do in a language like C++, but in assembly language it was quite tough."

Despite its decent AI, *International Soccer* nonetheless has its quirks, one of which is comically bad goalkeepers. "It was difficult to work out how to handle them when writing a game to be controlled by a joystick with only one button," explains Andrew. "I wanted to give the player some involvement with making saves because it adds to the excitement." Reasoning that when trying to save a shot, you wouldn't have possession, Andrew used the fire button to make the goalies dive: "I think it worked pretty well and led to some exciting exchanges with repeated shots being blocked by the goalie and followed by further shots at goal. And although there were places you could shoot from that the goalie couldn't get to, I figured it at least required a bit of skill to get into those positions."

Another oddity is displayed when players receive a ball to the head – often, they can repeatedly head the ball half the length of the field. "That was an accident of the way I did the interaction between the player and the ball, but I thought it was funny so I left it in," says Andrew. He notes that along with this quirk, some of the game's playability came from not programming specific moves and tackles, instead letting it evolve from simple rules. "One rule handles the dribbling, and by chance you can sometimes lose possession of the ball by turning too sharply, which I thought added to the fun," he says. "The same dribbling mechanism led to the way you take the ball off an opposing player, which just sort of came about by itself. I think not trying too hard to make the game work in a certain way, but having a feel for what worked, was part of what led to its success."

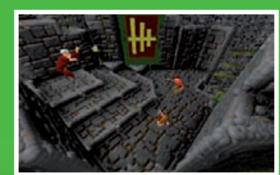
However, one specific change would have been made had a bug been unearthed before *International Soccer* was complete. "A friend who helped test the game always used to say 'now I've got the wind behind me' while playing left to right – or was it right to left? Anyway, I thought he was talking nonsense, there being no 'wind' in *International Soccer,*" remembers Andrew. "It was only some time later that I found a 'less-than' branch that should have been a 'less-than-or-equals', which gave the team going one way an advantage in every tackle. It's just as well that the teams change ends at half time to keep it fair!"

As long-time Commodore fans know, *International Soccer* ruled the roost for years. Along with being a pack-in game, it was reissued by CRL in 1988, and only *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* later that year eclipsed it. The game also kick-started Jon Ritman's career, since he created classic Spectrum footy game *Match Day* due to publishers wanting an *International Soccer* for Sir Clive's rubber-keyed wonder.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ECSTATICA [PICTURED]
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1994

ECSTATICA II
SYSTEM: DOS, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1996-7



» [C64] The player made cunning use of *International Soccer*'s heading quirk, despite running towards his own goal.

» [Intellivision] The Intellivision soccer game was Andrew's main inspiration for *International Soccer*, although he only saw the game once.

SOCCER HACKS

Although game mods are commonplace today, they were relatively rare back in the Eighties, bar, perhaps, the 40 billion fan versions of *Boulder Dash* and Miner Willy games. However, *International Soccer* has a handful of alternative versions of varying strangeness.

Aside from hacked versions that replace the advertising boards with those boasting the name of a cracking crew, one extended *International Soccer* adds options for controlling the size of the ball's arc when kicked, along with the 'trouser colour', providing the potential for blocky nudie footy, if that takes your fancy.

More bizarre, however, is a hack where the players are in wheelchairs (the goalie using crutches whenever he's called into action), which is either very PC or insulting, depending on your viewpoint. Stranger still is *Bonduelle Soccer*, which replaces the players with giant eggs on legs. Proof, indeed, that gin and programming do not mix.

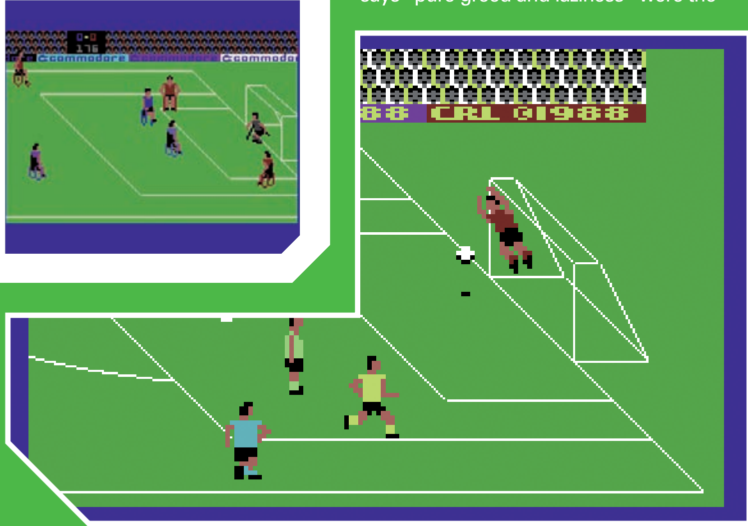
"I wasn't aware of this at the time – the one game it never occurred to me to work on was an improved version of *International Soccer*, which looking back on it now seems like a lucrative option," says Andrew. "I guess I was sick of working on football at the time – I could see little football players whenever I closed my eyes – and my interests were moving on to graphical adventures. After I got an Amiga, I didn't really take much notice of the C64. I must have led a rather blinkered existence. It's only recently that I've become aware of the influence of *International Soccer* on other games, and it's gratifying to know that it had that sort of impact."

Back in the Eighties, and with a major success under his belt, Andrew says "pure greed and laziness" were the root of his next game, *International Basketball*. "I thought I could adapt the *International Soccer* code into other team sports games and rake in a bit more money without too much effort," he admits, noting that he wanted to tap into the huge US market, which is why he focused on a sport popular in America. "I didn't know much about basketball, but then I hadn't had any great knowledge of football either, and so that didn't seem like a problem!"

Unfortunately, Andrew's cunning plan didn't entirely work. Although *International Basketball* was based on *International Soccer*'s code as much as possible, the game took far longer than expected. "One reason was that I never really knew what made *International Soccer* successful, and so I struggled to recapture the essence in *International Basketball*," he says. "I wondered if it was the graphics or tricks with programming that appealed to people. Looking back, I'd say it was something more like gameplay or playability, but at the time I couldn't put my finger on those concepts."

Visually, *International Basketball* is clearly a cousin of Andrew's soccer title, but he'd initially intended things to be very different. In a prescient move, he sketched cartoony players full of character, in an attempt to make them more endearing and 'alive'. "This was a way of making it distinct from *International Soccer*, by adding intentional humour, making it feel like a fresh project to work on," says Andrew. "I showed these character graphics to Commodore and they immediately shot them down, saying basketball players are tall and lanky, not short with big heads. I think this was a bit short-sighted, because they were basically proportioned like Mario and other characters that did rather well in the years that followed."

Devastated by this rejection, Andrew never fully recovered his enthusiasm for working on the game: "But I was a professional – and had signed a contract with Commodore – so I dutifully made the biggest, lankiest players that I could."





STREET SPORTS BASKETBALL

Although initially creating *International Basketball* to appeal to the US market, the game was never sold in the US. Disappointed about this, Andrew hopped on a plane to New York, discovered all the games companies were in California, and then flew to the West Coast. "I went round all the publishers I could find, touting my wares," says Andrew. "After a few weeks, I gave up and visited the Grand Canyon and travelled around Mexico." Some time after Andrew returned to England, he got a surprise call from Epyx. The company was interested in his basketball game, but it wanted some changes…

"This time, a project manager and several artists were involved," says Andrew, adding that there were some great engineers at Epyx who knew the C64 inside out. "The path development took was very much affected by a conversation soon after I arrived there, on the subject of 'sprite reuse'. They said you couldn't reuse a sprite on the line immediately below itself. I said you could – sometimes. We established it was possible, and they told me how we could make it work every time. This was exciting from a nerdy point of view – and I think the Epyx guys were impressed when I got it to work after a week or two – but it also let us make the basketball characters twice as detailed as in *International Basketball*, without any 'tearing'."

Despite *Street Sports Basketball* having the technical edge, Andrew prefers his original game: "The sprite trick used a lot of processor cycles and slowed things down, as did my technique for making the scrolling smoother, and this made the Epyx game less playable than *International Basketball*, even if it was prettier."

"THE INTERNATIONAL BASKETBALL PROJECT WAS SOURED BY INTERFERENCE FROM COMMODORE"

And armed with a thin book explaining the rules of basketball, Andrew managed to craft an exceptional game for its time – one that still appeals today, despite its pedestrian pace.

As with *International Soccer*, technical restrictions drove the type of basketball presented in the game, and matches are three-a-side to avoid sprite tearing. "This was a bug from *International Soccer* I couldn't fix, and it would've been worse in basketball, because players tend to crowd closer together than in football," says Andrew. "So I dumped the 'sprite reuse' code of *International Soccer* and went with eight sprites: one for the ball, one for the net – you can only see one at a time – and six for the players."

Passing and throwing at the hoop also caused problems. "It was no longer sufficient to use just eight directions as I did with *International Soccer*, where passes and shots could be less exact. With basketball, I had to work out where the player might want to pass or shoot, then calculate an exact trajectory to reach the destination," says Andrew. "I added some randomness based on the distance to the target, so shots and passes were more likely to succeed when they were nearby."

Elsewhere, though, the project was soured by further interference from Commodore. "With *International Soccer*, I was left alone to get on with it, but with *International Basketball*, I had a constant stream of letters from Commodore telling me to change things – 'the players are too short', 'the crowd is too British', 'you need to be able to do slam dunks', and so on," grumbles Andrew. "Most of these requirements originated in the US, and while they were probably very sensible ideas, they cramped my style and took all the fun out of making the game. I still had to do all of the hard bits of actually making it work as a game, but without the fun of being creative."

To cap it all, Commodore eventually decided not to publish *International Basketball* in the US, and although Andrew recalls reading positive reviews of his game at the time, they didn't lift his spirits: "I didn't feel that the game was as fun to play as *International Soccer*, and I was just glad it was finished after a long time working on it…"

Post-*International Basketball*, Andrew seemed to vanish, but he says he never really left the industry. After working on *Street Sports Basketball*, he spent years living off *International Soccer* royalties and working on adventure game ideas on the Amiga and PC. "This developed into my 'ellipsoid' game engine and animation tools, which Alain Maindron and I used to create *Ecstatica*," explains Andrew. After that, Psygnosis helped Andrew set up a small games studio, which worked on *Ecstatica II* and the unreleased *Urban Decay*, before closing due to a lack of funding. "I then returned to the games industry wilderness where I've remained ever since," says Andrew, who now works part-time at a university, writing programs to help with engineering research. "The rest of the time, I work on ideas for my next game. I'm not going to say what it is, but I have high hopes it will become a 'retro game' of the future!"



» The eight-directional movements of the players' shooting and passing in *International Soccer* had to be increased for *International Basketball*, due to a need for greater accuracy.

» *Street Sports Basketball*'s players may be more detailed, but Andrew believes *International Basketball* was the better game.

THE CLASSIC GAME

QUAKE II



In late 1997, after id Software had been hard at work setting, raising and re-raising the first-person shooter throughout the Nineties, *Quake II* was unleashed upon the world. Its multiplayer support for up to 32 players took the FPS world by storm and led to the hit title absolutely dominating the 1998 online gaming scene. *Quake II* went on to sell over a million copies and was instrumental in making 3D graphics cards a veritable home computing necessity rather than merely an optional extra reserved for the most hardcore of PC gamers. Craig Ritchie fires up his 56k modem and revisits one of the most influential sequels in videogaming history.



Flak Jacket

A *Quake* regular, these handy pieces of military apparel provided a bit of extra support as they softened the (many, many) blows from the inevitable Strogg bombardment that befell your unfortunate marine. A necessary piece of equipment that no self-respecting soldier would leave home without.



First Aid

It's quite handy that so many videogame baddies leave countless medical supplies strewn all over their places of business. *Quake II* is no different, and with the amount of abuse the Strogg hurl your way, you'll be collecting these and healing your ailments with an efficiency that the NHS could only dream of.



Shotgun Shells

Just one of myriad boxes of ammo that litter the halls of the Strogg base. We chose this one because *Quake II*'s shotgun blasts are ever so satisfying, and become even more so once you find that lovely double-barrelled beast. Powerful, violent and loud – the stuff FPS dreams are made of.



Quad Damage

Ah, Quad Damage, our old friend. A handy pick-up that pretty much does what it says on the Q-shaped box. While this may have given you an unfair (but highly enjoyable!) advantage over the regular single-player campaign enemies, Quad Damage was a multiplayer deathmatcher's Holy Grail.





It (really) defined a genre

As the creator itself said of its 1997 masterpiece, "By now, it had become clear that id's games were reason enough to upgrade, or even buy, personal home computers." *Quake II*'s influence extended way, way beyond just some first-person blasting fun. The versatile id Tech 2 engine that powered the game brought about an unprecedented modding scene and amazing multiplayer deathmatch madness, not to mention the most mind-blowing graphics the world had ever seen produced by the ugly grey box. And oh, let's not forget, that it was responsible for influencing the future of an entire industry. The word 'classic' sounds about right to us.

Not your common or garden Tank

When someone is out to kill us by whatever means necessary, it is not strange for us at **Retro Gamer** to admit we like the guy. We do. Like blasting him to pieces, that is. Take Tank, our favourite *Quake II* enemy. When you first encounter this behemoth, he's standing in the way of a workstation terminal the player needs to access. Unhappy that you've disturbed his computer time (how he handles the keyboard with guns for hands, we'll never know), Tank unleashes a barrage of bullets from his arsenal. Dropping this big guy requires more firepower than any of the enemies you've faced so far, so it's all the more satisfying to see him fall.



Why are we here?

Quake II had a memorable intro sequence as well as a solid back story, and went so far as to present players with briefings and objectives for each stage. This may sound simple now, but it was a big deal back in the day. See, most FPSs had hitherto dumped us in some sort of dangerous locale with the simple and solitary goal of reaching the end of the level (often marked 'Exit') while killing anything that stood in our way. Now we also had to do such things as reconfigure satellite communication links or locate and activate power cells, all before reaching the end of the level (often marked 'Exit') while killing anything that stood in our way.



Big and round

While there were more powerful weapons on offer (the rocket launcher and BFG come to mind), we've always had a special thing for the chain gun. Some of our most enjoyable moments were those where we found ourselves loaded up with ammo and stepping into a room full of enemies. What good times we had, readying this rotating beast and then holding down the left mouse button as we truly delivered a HAIL OF BULLETS in capital letters. Very handy for us, then, that the lazy Strogg left a couple of these just lying around instead of locking them safely away where no invading marines could get their hands on them…



Supply Station

After some gratifying levels of mindless gunfighting, the player reaches the Supply Station, with the objective of destroying the Strogg logistical train and finding the missing power cells for the warehouse. The Supply Station is full of elevators, conveyor belts, and other heavy equipment. Many of these could be switched on or off, allowing for inventive killings including crushing enemies under lifts and dropping a large, explosive crate onto the unsuspecting Gunner below (see screenshot). Navigating through this stage meant powering up the right conveyor belts and activating switches from afar with carefully aimed shots.



If I'm going, you're coming with me

Adding novelties to an (almost) decade-old genre is the only way to keep your sequels from being just more of the same. id Software was the first to realise that not every opponent should just keel over dead when the player had unleashed the necessary amount of bullets into it. So, hit an enemy just enough and in his death throes he would take some final shots at you – sometimes this was a random twitch reaction to having his head blown off, while others were aimed right at you. So although you can take the Strogg down with a few careful hits, you're only really safe once that extra shotgun blast has seen them explode into meaty chunks.

What the mags said… ages ago

Gamespot

"We must conclude that *Quake II* is nothing less than a remarkable game, and we recommend it without hesitation. But still… although it's never been done better, it has all been done before, and that casts a shadow on the experience that no amount of technology can hope to penetrate."

What we think

While we don't think everything in *Quake II* had been done before, we admit its contribution to gaming came more from its technological achievements rather than any leap in gameplay. But for what it added to the gaming world and the path it paved for the future of 3D hardware, *Quake II* is undeniably a landmark title.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** PC
- **DEVELOPER:** IDSOFTWARE
- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

WHEN SID MEIER AND BILL STEALEY DECIDED TO SET UP THEIR OWN GAMES PUBLISHING COMPANY, IT WAS NO FLIGHT OF FANTASY. THE PAIR WERE CONFIDENT MICROPROSE WOULD SUCCEED, AND IT DID, FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES, AS DAVID CROOKES RECALLS IN THE FIRST OF A TWO-PART SERIES

MICRO PROSE (PART 1)



Most of MicroProse's box artwork was similar. A simple picture framed by a border with the unmistakable logo meant fans of the company could instantly spot the games on the shelf.

Back in 1982, Sid Meier was smug. Or, to be exact, 'SMUGGER'. It may appear that Retro Gamer has suddenly become very rude towards the programmer behind *Civilization*. But no. We're stating an absolute fact…

Meier was an employee at electronic component manufacturer General Instrument. He was a young and talented programmer and, having bought his first computer, an Atari 800, he was starting to produce his own games – albeit primitive ones – in BASIC.

At the same time, a gentleman by the name of Bill Stealey was working his way up the ladder in the financial department of the very same company. His real desire, however, was to be an entrepreneur. But as a smart graduate from Wharton – one of the top three business schools in the United States – laziness had meant he had ended up working for somebody else, although he was constantly keeping his eyes peeled for opportunities.

In the early-Eighties, an industry was growing. Bill had gone to General Instrument as a director of strategic planning. That meant he had to deal with lots of financial documents and calculations and, being smart but not wanting to do drudge work, Bill wanted to find a way to create those financial documents more easily. He discovered one of the first spreadsheet programs, VisiCalc, and looked for a computer to use it on.

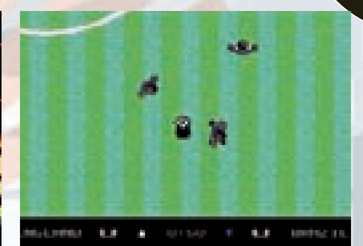
Among the computers he looked at was Tandy's TRS-80 microcomputer – which had been selling well to hobbyists, home users and small businesses from the late-Seventies – a machine boasting 4KB of memory and a Z80 processor. He also noticed an Atari 400 and asked what it was, since the Atari was demonstrating an early game known as *Star Raiders*. Bill was a big *Star Trek* fan and was impressed with the game. Since the Atari ran VisiCalc as well as games, he went on to buy the Atari 800,



Like many of MicroProse's earlier titles, *Airborne Ranger* was heavily influenced by military themes.



Stunning graphics marked out MicroProse games from the competition as *F-15 Strike Eagle* shows.





Conflict In Vietnam was a game close to Bill's heart since he had lost friends in the Vietnam War.

MICROPROSE INSTANT EXPERT

MICRO PROSE

Sid Meier is one of the most respected game designers in the world – and he says his main influence was his imagination as a child. He would spend many hours building his own worlds in his head.

Sid also found it fascinating to watch the trains, which went by his grandparents' house. The history of the railway system and the punctuality of the trains gave him an idea for a later game…

The first game Sid produced and sold was a *Space Invaders* clone. He printed the manual direct from his printer and popped it together with the disk into a plastic bag. He sold less than a dozen.

Bill Stealey is highly intelligent. Now aged 61, he is a retired United States Air Force Lt Colonel and Command Pilot as well as a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania – one of America's finest.

Sid and Bill started MicroProse in 1982 – with a game called *Hellcat Ace*. Bill's aviation background prompted him to make annual requests to Sid to make further popular flight simulators.

Bill hoodwinked retail stores into carrying MicroProse's initial games – pretending to be a customer asking for the firm's games to drive up demand then stepping in to feed the apparent insatiable appetite.

Bill's ruse worked. Before long, the company was employing more people. By 1988, it had 250 workers, and games such as *Pirates!*, *Solo Flight*, *Silent Service* and *F-15 Strike Eagle* behind it.

It had also opened up offices across Europe with the most notable being in the UK, headed by Stewart Bell. It created gems such as Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer*.

MicroProse liked to put people's names before a game's title. It created a fan base that was great for marketing.

Bill still flies his own T28 Trojan WarBird. Sid doesn't make flight simulators any more.

which was packed with 16K of memory – 48K if you added the basic cartridge.

"I wanted to discover more about what this computer could do," explains Bill, "and I came across an Atari user group which was pirating games. The guy who ran the group wasn't interested in the financial things that the computer could do but he was looking at the technology behind the games on the computer. It became apparent that he was gathering knowledge to use in his own games. He was called Sid Meier."

That group was the Sid Meier User Group. Or SMUGGERS for short. Bill soon became friends with Sid, whose first computer was also an Atari 800. At a General Instrument company meeting in the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Sid decided he had had enough and invited Bill to slip out with him. "We went downstairs," recalls Bill. "There was a flight simulator there called *Red Baron* and I challenged him to a game. He beat me but I remember Sid saying: 'I could programme a better game in a week!'"

Sid felt the AI of the enemy was too predictable and he had memorised the algorithms watching Bill play the game first. Bill bragged back. "If you do, I could sell it," he said. Sid produced a combat flight simulator called *Hellcat Ace* about three months later. Bill was surprised by the development and took the game to review. Bill did not want to have to live up to his boast and decided to review the game badly. Bill wrote a four-page bug-and-change list, and gave it to Sid, thinking that would be the end of the discussion. Sid brought the fixed product back and asked Bill: "Can you sell this?" That was in August 1982.

It wasn't Sid's first game, however. He had actually been playing around with computers since the early-Seventies, starting with an IBM 360 mainframe on which he learned Fortran programming. He produced simple offerings: space titles and a tic-tac-toe game. He used his Atari 800 to produce a *Space Invaders* clone (the first game he sold – albeit around a dozen copies) and he had also created a racer called *Formula 1*, which was distributed by Acorn in 1982. But *Hellcat Ace* was his first important release, which, along with the side-scrolling arcade game *Chopper Rescue*, helped Sid and Bill's new company, MicroProse, to take off faster than the aircraft in their hot new games.

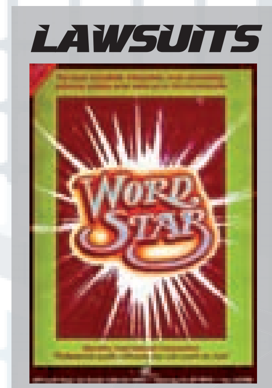
"I called up computer shops and asked them if they had any copies of *Hellcat Ace*," Bill laughs. "I would get a negative answer and then hang up. I'd repeat this a few times and then I'd call, as myself, some time later telling the shops that I had copies of *Hellcat Ace* for sale. They'd tell me: 'We've had lots of enquiries for that game, sure we're interested.' And that's how the sales began."

Bill worked to build up the company in his spare time. He would spend the day at General Instrument and the night, from 6pm to midnight, ensuring MicroProse was a viable company. A year and $200,000 later, he went full-time but it would be another 12 months before Sid quit his job to join MicroProse in the same capacity. In that second year, MicroProse employed three further workers – including Sid's first wife, Leslie.

Sid's love of creating flight simulators was perfect for Bill, who had a side career as a fighter pilot with the US Air Force Reserve. It was this mutual love of flying which caused the pair to bond – Sid also knew how to put together great games while Bill had the ideal background to market them. Some may have accused the MicroProse games of being overly militaristic with a jingoistic air about them, but there was no doubting their attention to detail.

Bill's military background helped on another level, too. Bill – who was known as 'Wild Bill' from his time at the USAF Academy in Colorado due to his lacrosse style of play – was the outgoing partner in the business, Sid being noticeably shier. The pairing worked wonders and

LAWSUITS



In 1988, MicroProse was being threatened with a lawsuit by MicroPro, makers of the word processing program WordStar. The company was claiming that MicroProse had been causing market confusion by adopting too similar a name.

"We actually got calls from members of the public asking for help with WordStar," admits Ed Magnin, one of MicroProse's programmers at the time. "MicroProse's spokesman, Mike Harrison, told the press that it had until 16 June 1988 to start using a new name although it was allowed to use the words, 'formerly MicroProse Software' up until June 1991."

However, MicroPro was bought by another company and MicroProse didn't have to change its name after all.

Whenever MicroProse advertised its games in the early days, it would include details of how to buy the title by post.

the regimented approach Bill had towards business was the driving force behind MicroProse's success.

"I'm a fighter pilot. I have the mind-set that you're not going to get shot down, that you're going to accomplish the mission," says Bill, who lost friends and classmates in Vietnam. "So I just worked out how to make MicroProse work and went for it. We were building a product, making that product and lining up people to convert it. Then we were selling it."

And sell they did. In 1983, MicroProse produced the *Floyd Of The Jungle* game, which allowed four joysticks to be hooked up to the Atari 800 for multiplayer fun. "For me, it was like early Activision games," says Bill. "I liked it because I had three kids and all four of us could play together." *Floyd Of The Jungle* was not a great commercial success but it did move MicroProse Software along.

More success was to come in June 1984 when Sid's latest game, *Solo Flight* – in which the player flies over many States and delivers bags of mail – was given its first airing. Bill was at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, Illinois, having booked a ten by ten booth. The game began to catch attention, not least from US developer and publisher Human Engineered Software, or HESware as it was better known. It offered $250,000 for *Solo Flight*. Bill asked Sid what he thought about the offer.

"Sid would always say to me, 'I had 'hired' a Wharton MBA to make those difficult decisions'," says Bill. "But this time he continued and told me: 'I heard you never give away the family jewels!'" Bill decided to keep *Solo Flight* for MicroProse, HESware went bankrupt within months, and Bill and Sid went on to sell more than $1 million of *Solo Flight* for MicroProse.

Still, all Sid wanted to do was programme. He wasn't interested in the running of MicroProse and devoted himself to creating the very best games he could. This was a time when titles didn't require obscene sums of cash to be thrown at them; a time when a programmer only had to think of a topic and base a game around it. "We could experiment," says Sid. "There wasn't a lot of money at stake in the individual titles so we could take risks that today would not be possible."

Other programmers noticed Sid's devotion. "You start a restaurant because you love to cook, but then you quickly find out there's a lot more than cooking to running a restaurant," says Ed Magnin, a programmer hired by MicroProse in 1986. "And that was the same with Sid. He started a games company to make games. He didn't want to run a software department, supervise other programmers, or worry about sales. What's more, Sid had a knack for playing other games and guessing how they might have implemented some features. He liked to experiment between game projects and come up with some new tricks he could use in the next game. Many designers start as artists and then ask others to create the technology. Sid created some snazzy new technology first and then figured out how to create a game to capitalise on it."

Ed started at MicroProse creating Apple II games. "When I was at MicroProse I felt like I was a second-stringer or on the junior varsity team," he says. "When we

US GOLD



US Gold boss Geoff Brown gives us his recollection of MicroProse: "MicroProse was among the companies I first signed up for publishing in the UK under the US Gold brand. Apart from a couple of early chopper-based products from Cosmi, I didn't really have any flight sims for the C64 or Amiga that were anything like realistic. Over on the PC they were big business with *Flight Simulator* and the add-on disks. I actually did the deal for the rights to publish with Bill Stealey who founded and ran the company and provided the ideas.

"Bill was a larger than life, in your face, brash American, who actually wore a military uniform to the first CES shows. I always saluted him when I met him. To most Brits he seemed like an ex-combat guy/flier and he was usually accompanied by his wife. He was always calling and asking how sales were going and was generally more pushy than my other licensors, but we all respected that and really went to town to make the sales for him.

"I don't remember the product release exactly, but among the first were *Solo Flight*, *Spitfire Ace* and the million-selling *F-15 Strike Eagle*. He really helped to put US Gold on the map and extend our product range into new areas. They eventually opened their own publishing division in the UK, but I believe it was our sales and marketing that helped to position them at first."



While it wouldn't win any architectural awards, this building was home to MicroProse in 1988 in the US.

SIX OF THE BEST

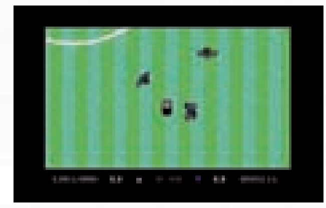
Gunship (1986)

Gunship works well as a flight action game. Admittedly, it has aged a lot – some of the keyboard functions are not that reliable either – but it was a great introduction for newcomers and it was underpinned with the most gorgeous graphics. "It got us big in Europe," says Bill. "Trip Hawkins apparently said that 'anyone could sell *Gunship*'. He was saying we were not that good, we just had a great product."



Sid Meier's Pirates! (1987)

Pirates! was a smash hit, drawing on Sid's growing reputation by including his name in the title. Starting off on the C64, it let you taste life as a privateer in the Spanish Main, taking a novice swashbuckler and making him a legend. As a departure from MicroProse's flight sims, it was disliked within the company but its success won over the doubters. Gamers just adored the delicious blend of action, planning and trading.



MicroProse Soccer (1988)

Along with *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer, MicroProse Soccer* was part of the 'big two' in the late-Eighties. The overhead view allowed players to get a great feel of the action and it was packed with features. Curl balls, replays, changeable weather and end-to-end play with silky skills, this was an undoubted UK success story for MicroProse.



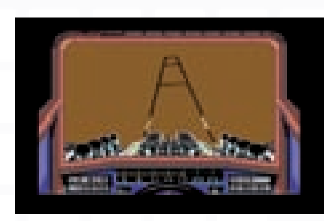
F-19 Stealth Fighter (1988)

This game was a prime example of the detailed packages MicroProse often created. The glossy manual filled you in on the delights of being a fighter pilot and the cardboard cutout keyboard overlay made playing easier. Whichever mission you were on, you had to master the flight and it wasn't easy, requiring a lot of skill as you penetrated further into enemy airspace.



M1 Tank Platoon (1989)

With 500,000 sales, *M1 Tank Platoon* was a brilliant 3D tank warfare tactical sim. You were put in control of four M1 tanks and had to mix strategy and first-person tank warfare to teach the enemy a lesson. You had the choice of a single mission or a campaign. Completing missions in campaign mode had an effect on future missions as the game read your skill level.



Stunt Car Racer (1989)

When asked what marked *Stunt Car Racer* out among its peers, you could answer 'speed'. But it was also massively innovative, with races taking place on an elevated racetrack. The eight circuits also had troublesome gaps that you had to avoid unless you enjoyed plummeting to earth. Atmospheric and novel, the game was released on MicroProse's MicroStyle label.

finished a PC game we had a party in the warehouse and broke out the cake and champagne. When we finished an Apple II or Apple IIGS game, they said here's $25, take your wife out to dinner."

Meanwhile Sid was beginning to tire of military games and yet they were helping to make his name. His fan base was growing strong which is why, in 1987, MicroProse decided to launch a pirate simulator with Sid's name in the title.

Sid Meier's Pirates! aimed to pick up fans of the programmer's earlier games and it proved to be massively successful, ported on to many systems over the following five years. The fans adored it, but Bill seldom missed a chance to give Sid's fame a peg up. Following an Amiga conference in San Francisco, Bill and Sid were having dinner. Bill told the maître d' to ensure fellow diners would not bother Mr Meier, the author, who just wanted a quiet meal without the bother of autograph hunters. By the end of the night, Sid was inundated with people asking him to sign their napkins…

By 1988, MicroProse had grown, and it now employed 250 workers. Sid continued to work on games but MicroProse could now devote resources to multiple projects. "We all learned a lot from Sid, especially those who worked 'porting' or 'translating' his games from the Commodore 64 to other platforms," explains Ed. "We got to see his code and how he did things. Many of us went on to work for other top companies."

Despite the fame and adoration from fellow programmers, Sid remained shy. "I was at lunch with Sid and some of the programmers asked him to fix a bug," says Ed. "Rather than tell them he was busy eating, he went to his office and came back five minutes later. I commented that he'd just made the fastest bug fix I'd ever seen. He said: 'Hey, I was hungry'. I got the impression he just hit the 'build' button to rebuild the same game and then went back to fix it after lunch. This, to me, was an example of him being a shy guy who didn't want to tell the testers to come back after lunch."

In the same year – 1988 – Bill had spent six months talking to Trip Hawkins who, in 1982, had left Apple to form Electronic Arts. The two self-confessed big egos were discussing strategy, with Trip Hawkins eager to move into Europe, a territory into which MicroProse was making inroads. But Trip had another trick up his sleeve – EA was in the midst of reverse engineering the Sega Mega Drive.

The firm was miffed that it would have to pay big royalties to Sega to make Mega Drive games. So to avoid all legal issues and to not have to pay royalties, EA decided to reverse engineer the Mega Drive with its own engineers and no help from Sega. At the same time, EA decided on its sports game strategy and, with no Sega royalties to pay, was able to quickly build the company. These two efforts by EA really got them off the ground in a big way. It was a strategy MicroProse didn't want to emulate.

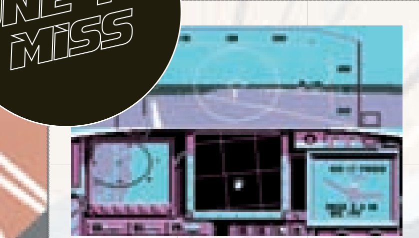
"That turned EA into a successful company. They grew to have 23 per cent of the Mega Drive market," explains Bill. "I am a US Air Force Academy Graduate and we have an honour code which prevented me from allowing MicroProse from going down the same path. That was not the very best business decision on our part though."

Still, the push in Europe was going well. Talks had been conducted with Geoff Brown, owner of Birmingham-based US



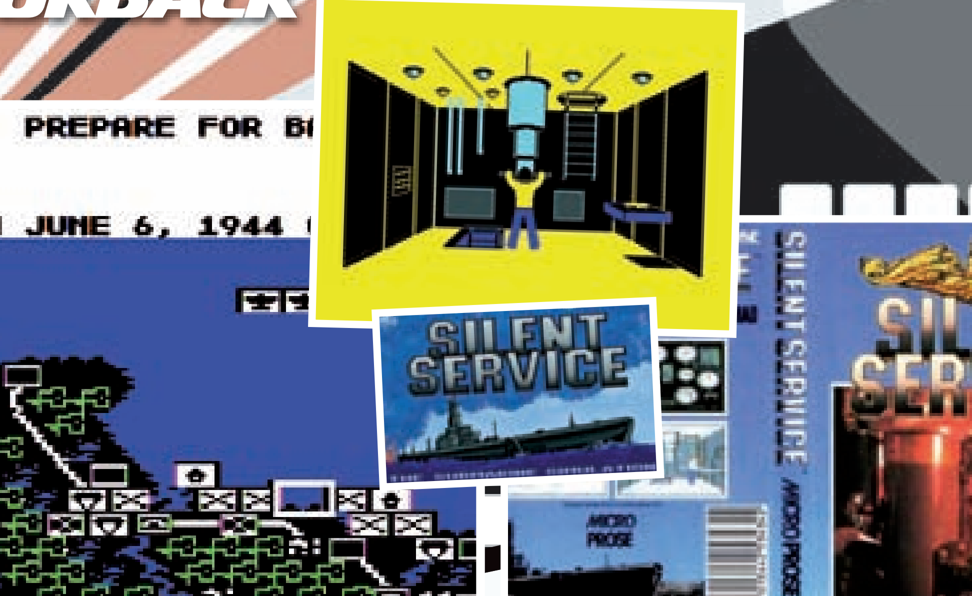
DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

ONE TO MISS



F-15 Strike Eagle II (1989)

Although Bill Stealey says *F-15 Strike Eagle* in 1985 established MicroProse as a major developer, the sequel, despite similarities to *F-19 Stealth Fighter,* was too easy and simplified. The relentless enemy bombardment proved too much at times and with this reliance on repetitive gameplay, the game becomes more of a test of endurance than anything else. On the positive side, the action is high tempo with enemies coming thick and fast. Put alongside other MicroProse games, though, something just seems lacking.



MicroProse games were ported to a large number of machines, even the C64's rival, the Amstrad CPC.

Gold and, in 1986, the company began to sell MicroProse's games in the UK and on the continent. "There was a problem, though," recalls Bill. "I flew to the UK and went to see Boots, but they wouldn't take my meeting. The bosses there didn't know the MicroProse brand, and that's because every one of our games had US Gold plastered on the front of the box. I knew I had to change tact – if I couldn't get a meeting with a major supplier, something was wrong."

The US Gold deal was brought to an end and in came Stewart Bell to head up a new UK division. By this time, the company had released a wealth of top games including *Gunship*, *F-15 Strike Eagle* and *Silent Service* and it was looking to open up in other countries. Soon it would have offices in France, Japan and Germany too but the large glass-fronted UK office, in Tetbury, Gloucestershire, was important and helped to create some of MicroProse's best games. Indeed, 40 per cent of the worldwide MicroProse transactions were controlled from the UK. It had a telesales department, a 20,000-square-foot warehouse shifting a million units a year and a playtesting section. Stewart was the UK's managing director and it signalled a period of further growth for MicroProse.

Despite this expansion, however, there was still some criticism. The games themselves were notable for their quality but the prices were often high. Stewart says this was due to the investment made in the games. "*Gunship* cost $4 million and took over 17 man-years to develop," he explains. "The final packaging and documentation was of a very high quality and was always well researched."

As if to underline the emphasis on quality, *Gunship* was 18 months late, testament to MicroProse's stance that games wouldn't be released until ready. The game also ensured it rewarded high scorers – an in-game winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor would be handed a certificate signed by Bill and they would be rewarded with a flight in Bill's T28 Trojan, a World War II-era Navy training aircraft.

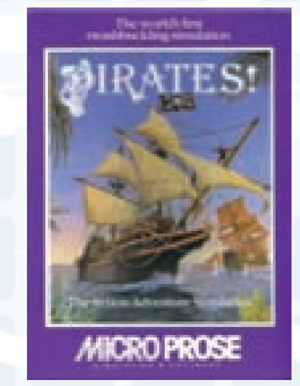
Such attention to detail and care for customers meant people knew they were getting value for money. Indeed, the packaging was immense – it was not unknown to have accompanying booklets stretching to 150 pages or more. This put off pirates too, and sales were buoyant. *F-15 Strike Eagle* sold a million copies across formats. But work didn't stop there…

"Many companies release a product and then forget about it," Stewart told *Crash* magazine at the time. "MicroProse's product development is a constantly ongoing process, which lasts between one and two years. *Project Stealth Fighter* is currently in its eighth version, utilising faster algorithms and improved gameplay, while the latest version of the C64 *Pirates!* has animated pictures."

Still, if some programmers had their way, the games would have been even more expensive. "I never understood why we would sell tape games for £9.99 when they were so much trouble to produce and disk games – which were much easier – for £15.99," says Ed Magnin. "I always felt we should have priced the two the same or swapped the prices to encourage people to move to disk."

But things were going well. There was belief within MicroProse that they and EA would grow powerful enough to carve up the games market between them.

MicroProse began to bring in new staff. It employed Bruce Campbell Shelly, Arnold Hendrick and Lawrence Schick, from board game company Avalon Hill as programmers and producers. It also took on producer Ed Bever, a PhD history professor from Princeton. Sid, who by now was settled near Baltimore, Maryland, was quick to spot their potential.





A departure for Sid but a successful one, and it marked a slight change in direction for military-obsessed MicroProse.

MICROPROSE TIMELINE 1982-1989

1982 MICROPROSE IS FOUNDED BY SID MEIER AND BILL STEALEY.

1983 MICROPROSE PRODUCES MULTIPLAYER ATARI 800 GAME, FLOYD OF THE JUNGLE.

1983 HELLCAT ACE FLIGHT SIMULATOR AND CHOPPER RESCUE ARE RELEASED.

1985 SOLO FLIGHT AND F-15 STRIKE EAGLE ARE RELEASED.

1985 SILENT SERVICE, NATO DIVISION COMMANDER, CONFLICT IN VIETNAM, CRUSADE IN EUROPE AND DECISION IN THE DESERT ARE RELEASED.

1986 A DEAL IS STRUCK WITH US GOLD'S GEOFF BROWN TO DISTRIBUTE MICROPROSE GAMES IN EUROPE.

1986 GUNSHIP IS RELEASED.

1987 SID MEIER'S PIRATES!, AIRBORNE RANGER AND F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER ARE RELEASED.

1988 MICROPROSE BUYS THE FIREBIRD AND RAINBIRD LABELS FROM BRITISH TELECOM. MIDWINTER GAMES AND RICK DANGEROUS ARE RELEASED.

1988 MICROPROSE EMPLOYS 250 WORKERS.

1988 MICROPROSE SETS UP OFFICES IN THE UK.

1988 MICROPROSE IS TOLD BY MICROPRO, VIA LAWSUIT, TO FIND A DIFFERENT NAME.

1989 UK TITLES MICROPROSE SOCCER AND GEOFF CRAMMOND'S STUNT CAR RACER ARE RELEASED.

1989 F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II RELEASED.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



A favourite of Bill Stealey, *Floyd Of The Jungle* allowed four people to play at once.



Sidney K Meier
Sid Meier co-founded Firaxis Games in 1996 with Jeff Briggs and Brian Reynolds. He is currently Firaxis's director of creative development. *Civilization* remains his key work. *Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution* was released this year and is the latest in what have become near-annual releases of this most successful franchise. Other recent games include *Sid Meier's Railroads!* in 2006 and *Sid Meier's Pirates!* for Xbox in 2005. In 2004, he celebrated 20 years as a games designer. He was the second person ever to be inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Science's 'Hall of Fame' for Lifetime Achievement in 1999.

Bill Stealey
Bill Stealey founded Interactive Magic in 1995 but left the company – which became known as iEntertainment Network – in 1999. He was asked to return as CEO in 2002. He currently runs the online game *WarBirds* at www.totalsims.com. But, more recently, he has set up Thriller Publishing, which will focus on multiplayer military and espionage-themed games with a focus on first-person shooters, action adventure, strategy and simulation. Bill says he is assembling many of the old MicroProse crew for this new venture, which will be creating titles for the PC, consoles, mobile gaming and online.

"SID DECIDED TO CREATE RAILROAD TYCOON AND CIVILIZATION AND, IN DOING SO, ALTERED STRATEGY VIDEOGAMING FOREVER"

In particular, he struck up a partnership with Bruce Campbell Shelly. They worked on *F-19 Stealth Fighter* together, with Bruce spending much of his first 12 months at MicroProse on the project. Bruce was a fan of *Pirates!* on the Commodore 64 and it was this game which made him keen to move out of board games and into computer games, a decision which would prove crucial as MicroProse headed into the next decade.

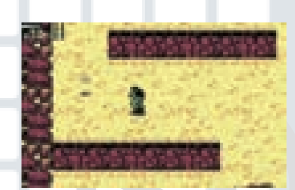
"This was our golden age," says Sid. "We had a brilliant set of people, the best programmers and artists, people who could really pull games together."

Indeed, MicroProse was always keen to try new markets. In the UK, the team produced the hit sports game *MicroProse Soccer*, and Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer* was winning new audiences. And when Amstrad announced the new Sinclair PC 200 in 1989 – a machine derided for being too much of a business computer that couldn't compete with the Atari ST and Amiga – MicroProse nevertheless decided to release new games for it and pushed Walt Disney and Sesame Street licences at a price of £9.99 each.

But such departures didn't always work. The Sinclair PC 200 was a failure, although it didn't damage MicroProse. What did damage the company's fortunes, however, was a decision to move into the arcade coin-op market. At the same time, Sid, despite opposition within the company, decided he too wanted to broaden his horizons and try a fresh approach to gaming. Bill wasn't overjoyed at this – he felt the formula of producing a military sim each year was a winner.

Unbeknown to most of the company's employees, Sid had actually sold his share of the company to Bill. As part of the sale, Sid was retained as a private contractor on an exclusivity deal, which tied him into producing games only for MicroProse. He would receive an advance before he began any game, another sum upon completion and royalties.

Now he wanted to move away from churning out flight simulators. He decided to create *Railroad Tycoon* and *Civilization* and, in doing so, altered strategy videogaming forever. As for MicroProse, it entered its second era of success…



Simulation Software sums up MicroProse's approach to gaming as with *Airborne Ranger* on the Atari ST.





Programmer Kevin Buckner with a MicroProse van… Kevin worked in both the US and UK, one of many to have flown across the Atlantic to work at both English-speaking divisions. MicroProse intended all of its divisions to work as a single whole.

MICROPROSE GALLERY



Airborne Ranger Year Released: 1987



Red Storm Rising Year Released: 1988



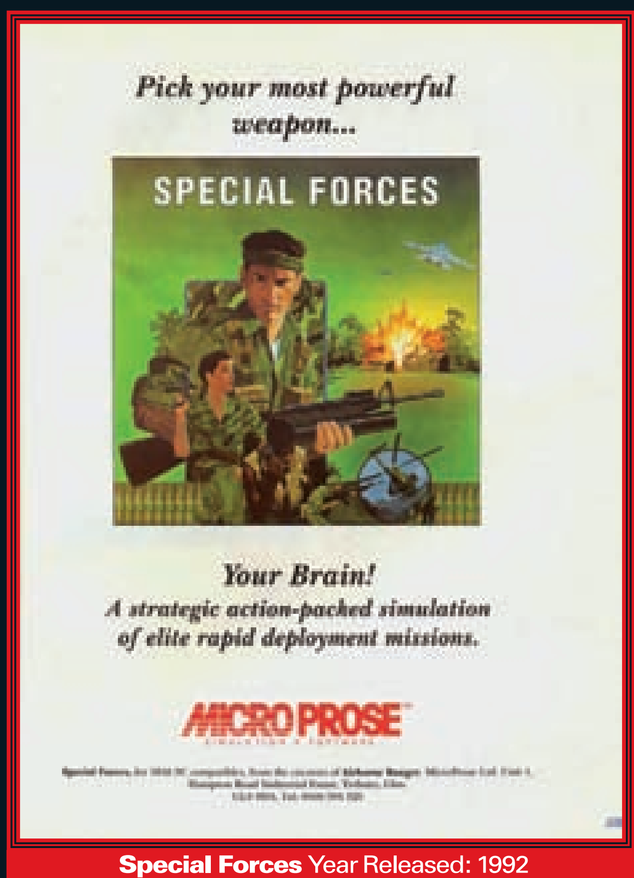
MicroProse Soccer Year Released: 1989



Gunship 2000 Year Released: 1991



B-17 Flying Fortress Year Released: 1992



Special Forces Year Released: 1992



Sid Meier's Pirates! Year Released: 1987



Covert Action Year Released: 1990



NAKED FAIRIES. WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?



- **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON
- **DEVELOPER:** RAFFAELE CECCO
- **GENRE:** ACTION PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

It's amazing how a little bit of female nudity will make you turn a blind eye to a game's insane difficulty. When *Stormlord* was first announced it interested me for two main reasons: one, it was the newest game from my personal CPC hero, Raffaele Cecco, and two, it had breasts in it and plenty of them.

As it turned out Cecco's latest game didn't actually need huge fairy mammaries in order to leave a lasting impression, all it needed was a far better difficulty curve. Honestly, *Stormlord* is quite possibly one of the toughest Amstrad CPC games I've ever encountered, and it has made me swear out loud more times than any other game. What's most infuriating about Cecco's glorious-looking game, however, is that you can see there is something really special underneath, and it's this knowledge that makes playing *Stormlord* all the more frustrating.

Puzzles throughout the large quest are beautifully executed and revolve around simple tasks like using keys to open doors, or pots of honey to lure away hordes of angry bees. What ruins it, however, is the relentlessness of *Stormlord*'s many enemies. You're usually given very little time to react when a creature does appear, and while Stormlord has some handy firepower and is able to make relatively impressive jumps, he's held back by the stodgy control system that's akin to wading through a pool of thick treacle.

Of course, even though *Stormlord* was insanely difficult, those nude fairies – hilariously edited with black squares in *Amstrad Action*'s cover tape – and those amazingly polished visuals kept me going back for more. I'd love to say that I eventually completed it and all was well in the world, but I was only ever able to get to the penultimate stage.

Looking back, there's no way that I would have blindly purchased *Stormlord* based on my sheer love of Cecco and *Amstrad Action*'s glowing review, if I'd actually been able to play the game first. But then, hindsight is a wonderful thing. And I still bought the sequel *Deliverance*!


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DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?

DATAFILE

NAME: EUGENE LACEY

DATE OF BIRTH: 28.2.1958

FIRST JOB: BARMAN AT THE SHIELD AND DAGGER IN WHITCHURCH, BRISTOL

CURRENTLY: PRODUCER, PUSHBUTTON

FAVOURITE FILM: THE DEER HUNTER

EUGENE LACEY


Computer & Video Games

SPACE WATCH

Galaxian Colony II!

NEW ALIEN PANIC

BORN IN IRELAND, RAISED IN BRISTOL AND EDUCATED IN LONDON, EUGENE LACEY WAS AT THE HELM OF BOTH COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES AND COMMODORE USER DURING THE EIGHTIES. HE TELLS PAUL DRURY ABOUT MAKING MAGS THE EMAP WAY, GEOFF CAPES' NIPPLE TWIST AND THE BIRTH OF GAMES JOURNALISM

It was a pain shared by all who grew up with 8-bit computers. That agonising realisation that the game listing you had just spent four hours typing in from the well-thumbed pages of a magazine had crashed and you'd forgotten to save the damn thing before you entered 'RUN'. Having worked on many a mag that relied on listings for much of its content, we reckon Eugene Lacey has some explaining to do.

"I had to enter the code onto various computers too, making sure the programs worked and looking for the best ones to publish," retorts Eugene, recalling the digit-numbing torture of testing a ZX81 listing. "But when these long listings reached the designers, they'd try to fit the code in around illustrations they'd commissioned. Being artists and designers, they were far more interested in the images. Bits of code would go missing to make the page look more attractive. I remember some heated exchanges, with my editor, Terry, shouting, 'It's not copy, it's code! You can't just cut it!'"

Ah, so it was those arty types at *Computer And Video Games* that we should've been pointing our bleeding fingers at, though Eugene acknowledges that the laborious process of magazine production back then was prone to human error. He joined publisher EMAP in June 1982 and his first work appeared in *C&VG* issue 11, which sported the strikingly futuristic *Tron* on the cover. Things in the office, however, were still in the dark ages.

"When I started we still used manual typewriters," says Eugene. "You'd write copy on A4, send it over to the sub editor, they'd send it back for you to re-type, making any corrections, on another sheet of A4. That would be checked again by the sub and sent to the typesetters. They'd

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» **A career in covers…** *C&VG* 11: Eugene's first as a staff writer; *C&VG* 14: One of his favourites; *C&VG* 22: he moves up to assistant editor; *C&VG* 24: The 3D issue, dreamed up by Eugene and Mike Singleton over a pint; *C&VG* 36: Came with a Thompson Twins adventure game almost as good as their musical output; *Commodore User* 16: Eugene's first issue in charge posed a key question for proto-web surfers seeking ASCII porn; *Commodore User* 52: his last as editor, showing how things had become a bit more games orientated; *C&VG* 76: he returns to EMAP's flagship as editor; *ACE* 24: Eugene's brief tenure began by announcing the future of digital entertainment, the CD-i…

"I HAVE A HUNCH I WROTE THE FIRST EVER CRITICAL REVIEW OF A COMPUTER GAME. SHEEPWALK WAS SO BAD I FELT I HAD TO TELL PEOPLE…" EUGENE REFUSES TO PULL THE WOOL OVER GAMERS' EYES

re-key everything and you'd get these sheets of paper as long as your arm called galleys. You'd proof them and if there were mistakes the whole process could fall over. They'd be sent to the designers and that was the point the glue came out. They'd stick them on to big cardboard sheets leaving spaces for the images. Eventually that would be photographed – nothing was electronic until then – and it'd be off to print. Getting the magazine together was an incredibly time-consuming job. I'm sure readers thought we sat around playing games all day…"

It had crossed our minds, actually, though in those early days, commercial software was thin on the ground and often barely superior to the efforts of bedroom coding readers, hence the prominent position of those listings. Eugene's editor, Terry Pratt, would even commission programmers to produce type-ins for the magazine, resulting in early showings by Mike '*Lords Of Midnight*' Singleton and 'Andre's Night Off' by the mercurial Matthew Smith. "The angle was it was the missing screen from *Jet Set Willy*," says Eugene. "He agreed to do it but I had to go up to Liverpool and chase the code. It took some pulling together I can tell you."

Brimming with bright ideas for the mag, Eugene was promoted to assistant editor in the summer of 1984, by which time the UK home computer scene was blossoming… and the *C&VG* computer room was bulging. "Any machine that came out, we'd buy. Sometimes we got it from manufacturers but more often than not we didn't… I remember Terry and I going up to Dixons on Holborn Circus and buying a Spectrum. Money was available. EMAP did invest in the mag. We appointed a really clever boy from North London called Robert Schifreen as the 'Bug Hunter'. That computer room became his lair. He was a real computer nerd…"

And so were many *C&VG* readers. The magazine struck what might seem an uneasy balance between game coverage and heavy-duty technical information. Take the Christmas 1982 issue, which featured the wonderful *Santa Invaders* cover and news of *Donkey Kong Jr* in the arcades and *Arcadians* on the BBC Micro, together with two pages introducing the joys of machine code programming. Were readers really digesting hex to binary conversion tables over their turkey, Eugene?

"Those articles were there because we sensed that was what the audience really wanted. People were ready and willing to type code into their machines and tinker around with it. The widely held view was that to use a computer well you had to know how to programme it at least in BASIC. There wasn't this notion that you would only use it to run other people's software."

And the team certainly took what readers thought seriously, regularly surveying the readership and inviting focus groups into the office to comment on what they liked and disliked about each individual page. With sales figures in excess of 100,000 through much of the Eighties, *C&VG* must have been doing plenty right, its circulation growing hand in hand with the games industry it reflected. By being the first UK-based games magazine, it had strong links with the software houses, which had grown from mail-order bedroom coding outfits to major businesses. Eugene recalls wining and dining Eugene Evans while he bemoaned the fact that his bosses at Imagine Software couldn't get him the Lotus he was after due to the insurance being more than the cost of the car. Then there was Martin Brundle coming in to test racing games, The Thompson Twins flexi-disc that graced the cover of issue 36 and Chris Tarrant, Jools Holland and the assortment of celebs that handed out *C&VG*'s prestigious Golden Joysticks at the annual awards ceremony. "I wrestled The Hulk once," adds Eugene, nonchalantly. "It was a Marvel Adventure thing. He got me in an armlock or something. I do remember us having a big photo shoot with Geoff Capes when I was on *Commodore User* and he grabbed my deputy editor Mike Pattenden by the nipples, for some reason. He was squealing with pain…"

By the time Britain's Strongest Man was getting on his staff's t**s, Eugene

PAINTING PICTURES WITH CODE

Flicking through the early issues of *Computer And Video Games*, you're struck by the quaint hand-drawn illustrations that accompany most of the reviews, listings and the news features. "The designers would commission them and a lot of the budget went on that," explains Eugene. "I remember having to tell people what a game was about… mmm, it's about two spaceships attacking a rogue planet and the designer would go off and commission an artist! We would be like, 'No. Can we just get a photographer in to take screenshots?' We won that argument and now magazines are pretty much all screen grabs."

Eugene and his team were always trying to think outside of the box, resulting in some pretty memorable innovations. "I was down the pub with Mike Singleton and said: 'Wouldn't it be cool if you could get 3D games?' Doesn't sound particularly amazing nowadays but back then games were flat and black and white. We would be able to put glasses on the front, which wouldn't cost much, and the artists could do these 3D things that I'd seen in comics… I said to Mike: 'The trouble is we couldn't get anyone to do the code' and he said, 'Hold on a minute…' The next day I said to Terry [Pratt]: 'I've got this f****** amazing idea!' We spent the week pulling it together and that became the 3D cover for *C&VG* issue 24. We pretty much spent all day, every day, thinking of cool stuff to do on the magazine."

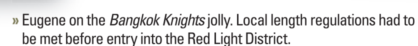
DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



» Eugene congratulates Programmer of the Year Jon Ritman for *Match Day* at the Golden Joystick Awards in 1988.

Measuring up the opposition – CU's Eugene Lacey falls for a Bangkok tailor's sales pitch



» Eugene on the *Bangkok Knights* jolly. Local length regulations had to be met before entry into the Red Light District.

KEITH CAMPBELL RIP

"Keith was the perfect columnist," says Eugene of the adventure writer who sadly passed away in 2006. "I've edited lots of mags and online properties and have managed many columnists. He was ideal because he was so passionate about his subject. He had so much enthusiasm for it. Take the Helpline – that could have been an idea that someone came up with and it might have worked for a little while and then fizzled out, like those things tend to do. But Keith had so much commitment to it and drive. He made it work and he made us make it work. His passion deserved to be met by an equal commitment from his publisher. We put together those Helpline cards. This was pre-web and instant feedback. It was a laborious job but because of Keith, readers were getting them drop through their letterboxes everyday – that direct feedback, all done with letters and reply cards. He loved the subject so much. And apart from the column, I just liked him. He was a really nice man. We had lots of drinks in various pubs and we didn't just talk about computer games. He told me all about his work and his family. He was a lot older and at a different phase of life. Looking back at those conversations, he was clearly a great dad and husband to Ruth. A real gentle giant who will be sorely missed.'



"GETTING C&VG TOGETHER WAS AN INCREDIBLY TIME CONSUMING JOB. I'M SURE READERS THOUGHT WE SAT AROUND PLAYING GAMES ALL DAY…"

EUGENE ASSURES US IT WASN'T ALL MARATHON JETPAC SESSIONS AT EMAP HQ

had moved on to *Commodore User*, EMAP's latest acquisition, in September 1984. This was his chance to edit and the move to a single format magazine didn't overly concern him. "Although *C&VG* had a wider lens, the Commodore 64 and Speccy were always at the core. The 64 was really starting to take centre stage and I knew that the Amiga was in the pipeline so I thought going on a Commodore mag was a safe bet. Plus it was more money and a car!"

What Eugene found was a far more serious magazine but the plan from the off was to widen its appeal through greatly increasing the game content. It was a slow transition over his years in charge, with the focus on commercial software being balanced by technical articles on Forth and the erudite Jim Butterfield illuminating readers on all manner of graphical trickery, but it was an inevitable shift in emphasis given the C64's rise to pre-eminence as a games machine.

"My background was *C&VG* and I always expected that was where *Commodore User* needed to be," explains Eugene. "As well as believing that was what people wanted to read, it was where the advertising was. Hardware was no longer the main source of advertising – software was."

The growth of the games industry resulted in, and was partly driven by, an army of PR people, eager to push their product and not averse to casually mentioning the revenue their clients provided through full-page ads. Eugene was often on the receiving end of such badgering, but is surprisingly generous in his assessment of their role. "They're the unsung heroes of the industry. Yes, they were aggressive but they got results and they taught the rest of the industry a few tricks. There was constant pressure to make you aware of a game and persuade you it was really good. Actually, when I was at *C&VG*, I have a hunch I wrote the first-ever critical review of a computer game. It was a Virgin game for the Spectrum called *Sheepwalk*, which basically was pretty crap. Before that, we'd been pussyfooting around the idea of do we critically review games or politely describe them? This game was so bad; I felt I had to say it might not be worth buying. I remember it caused quite a stir in the office. I overheard a conversation a colleague was having with the publisher and she was saying, 'Eugene's played loads of games so if he says it's rubbish, I'm pretty sure it is!'"

Not content with inventing critical games journalism, Eugene also pioneered the use of screenshots to accompany reviews (see 'Painting Pictures With Code' boxout on page 77) and it was this type of prescient thinking that helped him get one final promotion at EMAP, rejoining *C&VG* as editor in the summer of 1988. He found Tim Metcalfe had done sterling work in his absence and saw his mission as increasing the magazine's appeal to hardcore gamers. "I wanted to make sure *C&VG* was winning its fair share of first reviews and exclusives. It's the same these days – you chase the hot games. It became more businesslike, saying to publishers, 'You get the front cover and we get the game first.' Yeah, a fair few of those deals were brokered in The City Pride pub next door…"

One of Eugene's better deals was poaching Julian Rignall from *Zzap!64*, whose hardcore gaming credentials clearly indicated the magazine's intended direction. And so it was appropriate that Julian became editor when Eugene decided it was time to move on.

"I'd worked on game mags for eight years and I'd played so many games I was starting to feel jaded. I was getting too cynical and I felt I was short-changing the readers and the people that had made the game. I often look back and wonder whether it was the right decision, but it was the one I made."

Eugene elected to go freelance for EMAP, which he did for several years, including a short stint as acting editor for *ACE* magazine, but then drifted away from publishing altogether. He returned to the computer magazine scene in 1994 as editor of *The Mac* and in 1997 became editor in chief of *ZDNet UK*, overseeing the launch of website Gamespot UK a year later. He currently works at Pushbutton, a TV production company specialising in interactive television, which includes developing some simple games for the Disney Channel and Sky Vegas, but feels a return to games journalism is unlikely.

"I'm too old," he laughs. "I'm fascinated by new games, though. I have three kids and I play on the Wii with them and I'm under huge pressure to get a 360. I overdosed on games back in the Eighties but I don't think like that now!"

EUGENE 'EUGE' LACEY
Eugene has been in the software industry longer than he can remember, and certainly knows a good game when he sees one. He's a shoot 'em up fan, and is also partial to good arcade adventures and role playing games.
FAVE GAMES: Space Harrier (Amiga), Gradius, Strider (arcades).

» Eugene's final appearance in *C&VG* was issue 90, where like all good editors he names *Strider* as his favourite game…



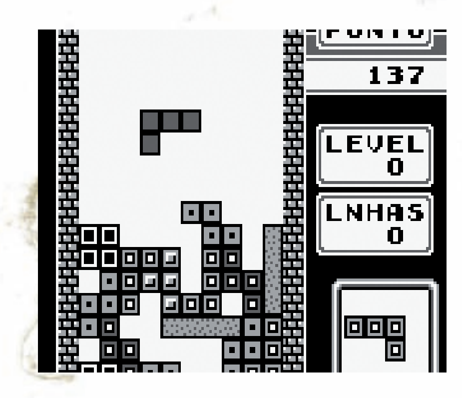
EUGENE LACEY DESERT ISLAND DISKS



SCRAMBLE

ARCADE

1 Preferably the coin-op version. My love of coin-op machines like *Space Invaders*, *Scramble* and *Galaxian* helped me land my first job at *C&VG*.



TETRIS

GAME BOY

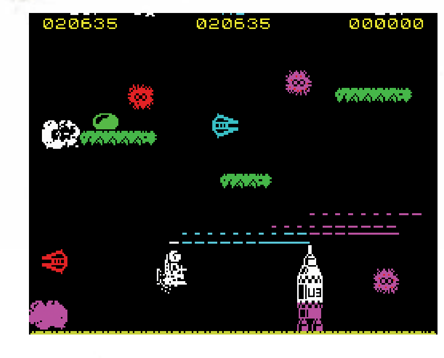
2 The single most addictive game ever. That's based on personal experience. I don't have much time to play computer games these days but I find time to play *Tetris*.



R-TYPE

PC-ENGINE

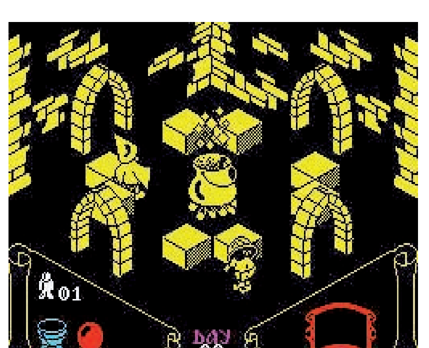
3 We got this directly from Japan, as a grey import. When the editor of *Login*, *C&VG*'s Japanese equivalent, visited our office, he was amazed to see that we had both *R-Type* and a PC-Engine to play it on.



JETPAC

SPECTRUM

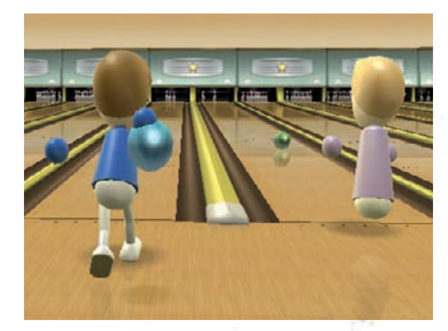
4 When this arrived at *C&VG*, we could hardly believe the smoothness of the animation and gameplay. I remember the stir it caused in the industry. I heard that the guys at Imagine jumped in their flash cars and drove down to Ashby to meet Ultimate after they saw it. I often wonder what kind of reception the Stamper boys laid on for the guys, or indeed if it ever happened.



KNIGHT LORE

SPECTRUM

5 A good meaty arcade adventure game would be an essential desert island game.



Wii SPORTS

Wii

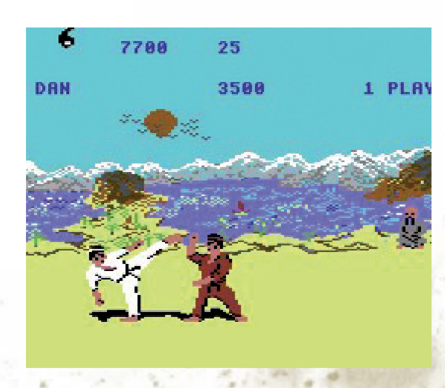
6 Nostalgia is all very well, but you can't ignore progress, so I hope **Retro Gamer** readers will allow this one modern slip.



SECOND LIFE

PC

7 Will you let me have Second Life? I know it's not exactly a game, though in many ways it is the natural development of adventure and role-playing games. If you say no, then I'll go for *The Sims* instead.



THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

COMMODORE 64

8 There has to be a beat-'em-up game on the island, and although there are much better modern examples of the genre, for old times' sake I would choose this. I guess the C64 version would be the best option.

› EUGENE LACEY

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Merman: Did you ever come under severe PR pressure to give a good review?
Yes! [laughs] The publishing companies can be very aggressive. I've had managing directors phone me up the day after negative reviews have appeared of their games saying, 'It's outrageous, I'm going to pull all our advertising from your magazine.' I've had that conversation several times. PR people have been responsible for many games being a success but it's come at a price. Not sure if it's still true, but in years gone by, especially the Nineties, reviews were very soft. Flick through any magazine and you'd have eight pages of screenshots and lots of excited description… then a rating of 78%. Typical mags might have a dozen reviews and they'd all be over 70%. It's just not possible for all games to be that good! I suspect the pressure is still there and that's why the reviewing isn't as tough as it could be.

Mayhem: How did you see the 'rivalry' between *Zzap!64* and *Commodore User*?
I'm pleased to answer this! I have so much respect for Newsfield and the innovation they showed with *Zzap!64* and *Crash*. Between us we invented some of the language of the industry – we came up with shoot-'em-up and *Zzap!64* came up with beat-'em-up, which were hugely useful labels. For a short while I think EMAP thought that we were away with it, but they came back at us with *Zzap!64* and it was formidable competition. The magazines were produced by hardcore gamers who really knew what they were talking about. I know Julian Rignall and Gary Penn have gone on to do great things… I was really pleased to get them working for us!

Northway: Were expos as cool as they sounded and who picked up the bar tab?
A lot of money was spent on food and drink it must be said. Chequebook journalism! Very much a social scene around game launches and expos. Organising a four-day expo and getting the magazine out as well was hard work. Having recently heard the sad news about Keith, I look back at those events with fondness, as I spent a lot of time with him. We always had the Adventure Helpline on our stand and that was a huge draw. He would man it with his co-columnist and it was always the most popular part of our stand.

Yethboth: What would you say is your all-time favourite console/computer?
They keep on getting more powerful and better with each new generation so I'll have to say the PlayStation 3. My son's currently making w****r signs at me and saying the Xbox 360 and he's probably right…

SirClive: What do you think of the 'virtual' *Computer And Video Games*? Do you think an online mag can ever replace the physical ones?
I've only seen it briefly. I looked out of curiosity a few months back and it seemed okay – but due to my connection with Gamespot, I'll say that's better… I don't see print disappearing any time soon. I think there's a real opportunity for them to work in harmony with online properties but it's going to take some bravery from the publishers to do it.

Mohicankid: Who's your favourite wrestler?
Big Daddy. I went to see him wrestle at the Royal Albert Hall through a PR jolly organised by my wife who was at Melbourne House and they had a wrestling game out. He was wrestling Giant Haystacks… I've got a picture of him getting my missus in an armlock.

Mikeb: Any memorable perks to the job? Were you among the lucky journos to be flown off to Thailand for the launch of *Bangkok Knights*?
I've driven a Ferrari, ridden Concorde, had meals in every posh restaurant in Europe… the treats were great! Yes, I went to Bangkok. We saw the Palace, rode on an elephant and went to the red-light district, but no, no Ping-Pong show. I'm a good Irish Catholic boy. And we also saw a Thai boxing match. It's the most horrific thing I've seen in my life. This guy got his leg broken. Horrendous.

The Master: Who is your favourite Dr Who?
David Tennant. I say that because there's a six-foot cardboard cutout of him standing at the foot of my bed right now. It belongs to my son. He's just brought it into the bedroom because he's sick of how long I've been on the telephone and he wants to get my attention…

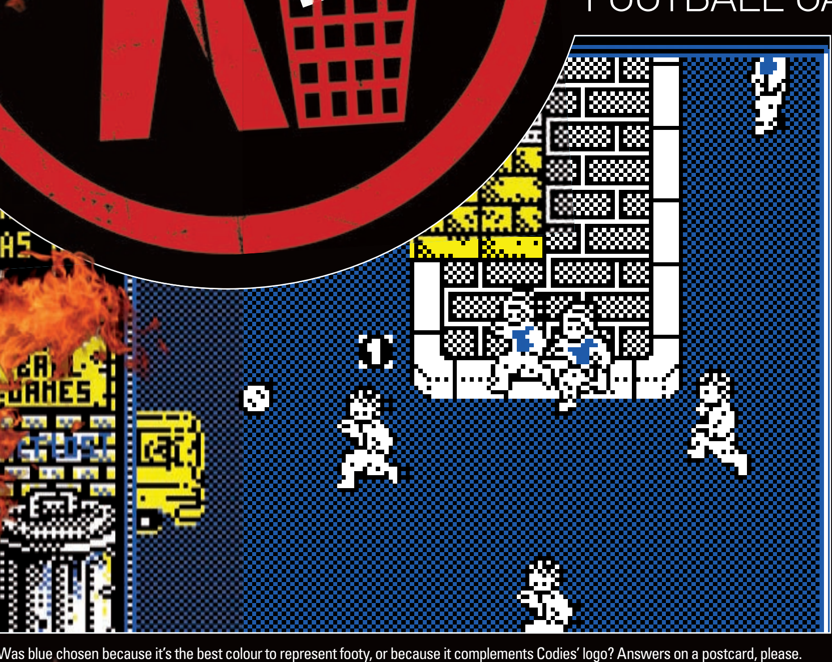
For your chance to quiz future castaways please visit the **Retro Gamer** forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum

RETRO SHAMER

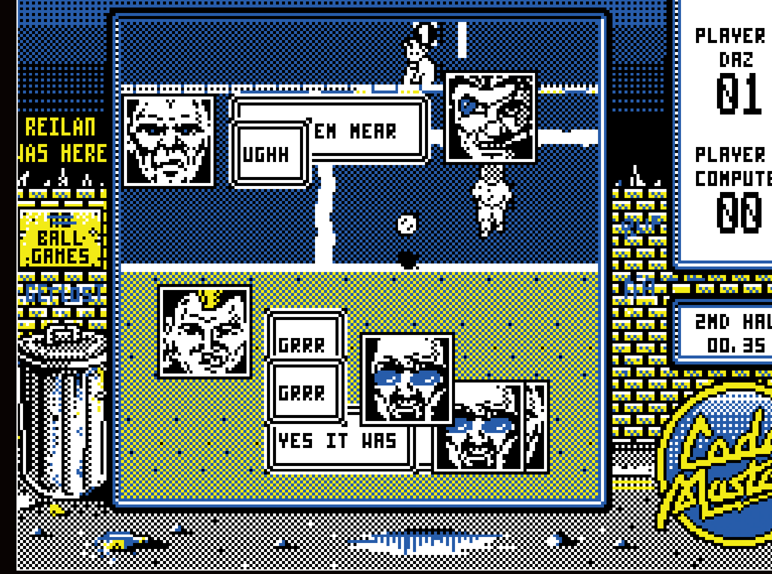
HEAD OVER TO THE **RETRO GAMER** FORUM WHERE YOU CAN NOW NOMINATE AND VOTE ON THE GAME YOU WANT TO SEE AS OUR NEXT RETRO SHAMER – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STREET GANG FOOTBALL

DARRAN JONES LOVED CODEMASTERS AND ONCE MADE A PLEDGE TO BUY EVERY BUDGET RELEASE THE PROLIFIC PUBLISHER CHURNED OUT. THAT OATH SOON CAME TO AN END THE DAY HE BOUGHT ONE OF THE MOST HORRIFIC FOOTBALL GAMES OF ALL TIME…

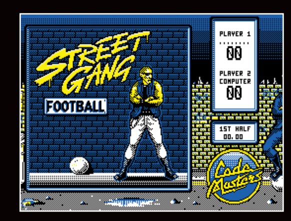


» Was blue chosen because it's the best colour to represent footy, or because it complements Codies' logo? Answers on a postcard, please.

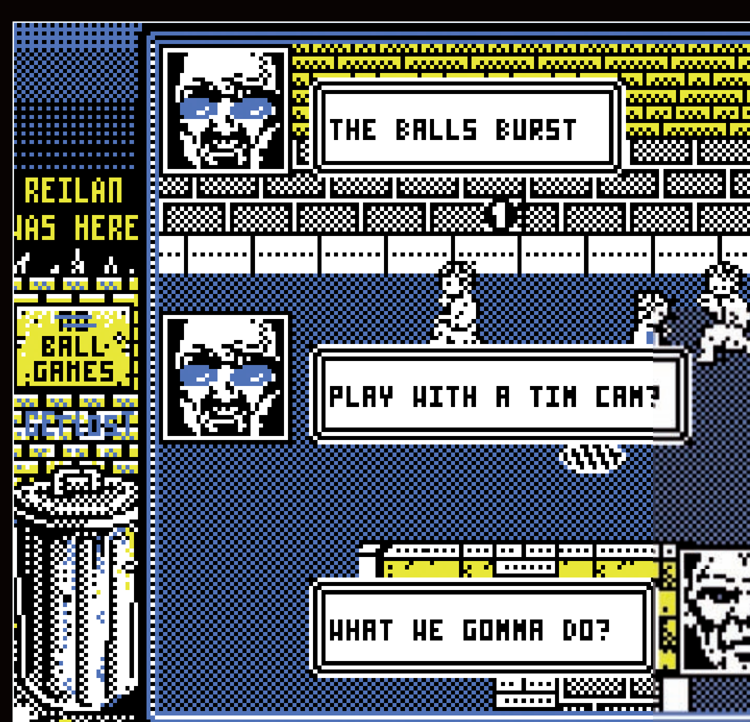


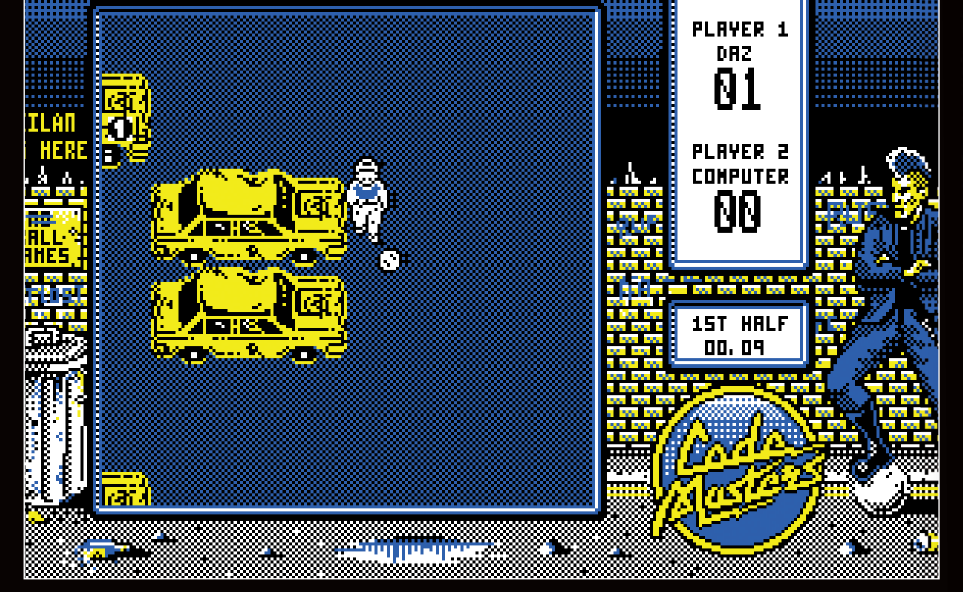
» Here you can see we've scored a goal, yet you still have to put up with this tiresome tirade. Amazingly, our goal was disallowed.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE LTD
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **GENRE:** SPORTS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+
» **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** SUBBUTEO





» Here's an indication as to how lame *Street Gang Football* actually is; the screen moved too fast for your character and he's currently stuck off-screen. D'oh!

It's a well-known fact in videogame circles that *World Cup Carnival* is one of the most hated soccer games of all time. A cynical cash-in by US Gold to profit from 1984's World Cup, *Carnival* evoked disbelief in those who played it, which turned to stark realisation when it hit them that US Gold's new title was actually nothing more than a repackaged version of Artic Software's *World Cup Football*.

Yet *World Cup Football* isn't the target of our rage that is currently so white it could appear in one of those naff Daz commercials. No, our football hatred is reserved for just one soccer game; a title that's so excruciatingly embarrassing to play through that even the game's mediocre-looking sprites wanted absolutely nothing to do with it. The game in question is Codemasters' *Street Gang Football*.

Now we all know you should never judge a game by its cover, but it is particularly applicable for *Street Gang Football*. The box reveals a scary-looking gang brandishing baseball clubs and booting a football into touch. It looks primal; it looks exciting; it looks nothing like what happens in the actual game.

There are no brutal fights in *Street Gang Football*. There are no baseball bats with which to pummel your opponents senseless with. There's not even the chance to actually play dirty, as the back of the box suggests, because tackling is so arbitrary that you may as well not even attempt it.

When fights do finally break out – after a long and lengthy debate of 'That's not a goal', 'yes it is', 'no it isn't' – they're in the form of cartoony dust clouds that have you waggling the joystick furiously in the hope you'll beat the opponent. Granted, we're no strangers to furiously waggling joysticks, but we can't recall ever winning a single bout of fisticuffs in *Street Gang*, and we've managed to complete the endurance test that is *Combat School*!

If *Street Gang*'s fighting – or what passes for it – leaves a bitter taste in your mouth, then the football itself is the equivalent of taking your toothbrush, running its head around the inside rim of your toilet and then brushing vigorously for 15 minutes. *Street Gang*'s biggest issue is it's just too damn slow to play a convincing game of footy. Players trundle along the jerky flick-screen pitch with all the speed of a hamstrung tortoise. It's painful to watch, let alone play. Your squad also appears to be intoxicated; they take an age to respond to your button presses and seem content to amble around.

Passing the ball is painfully hit and miss, because it seems to have a mind of its own, which immediately makes it far more intelligent than the sprites kicking it. Indeed the idiocy of the player AI is truly astonishing; the on-screen characters never act realistically. We were certainly not expecting *FIFA* or *Pro Evo* levels of realism in a game that's nearly 20 years old, but surely you'd expect the average videogame footballer to actually run forward and want to hit the ball if it landed near them? Not here, though. In *Street Gang* the players would rather run off and get stuck behind a car than, god forbid, try to score a goal. Of course, when you consider that goals in *Street Gang* are reliant on luck as opposed to any real skill, it's hardly surprising your team-mates disappear off-screen.

Even if you do manage to wrestle with the finicky controls long enough to get into your opponent's half of the pitch, and even if you do score a goal, there's still no guarantee it'll count. For you see, the (supposedly) volatile gangs you control regularly break into arguments when playing, and most goals are immediately accused of being out. You can hit the ball clearly in the middle of the wall that the opposition's goal is drawn on and your opponent will still swear blindly that it's not allowed. You become completely detached from the gameplay as the pitch fills up with quote boxes from the two team leaders arguing over a goal that clearly f**king went in!

Inevitably these arguments would lead to fisticuffs, but sometimes the two teams would just give up their bickering and go home. It's incredible that a programmer actually thought this would be entertaining. *World Cup Carnival* may have been a travesty of a football game, but at least it wasn't so boring that even the sprites eventually gave up on it. And to think we spent £1.99 on it…

POINTLESS PART

Street Gang Football was obviously created by two developers who had never watched a football match and simply discussed their idea for a new game while playing 'hit the urinal cake' in the staffroom toilet. After all, why else would you cut the playing size of the pitch down to the equivalent of just half the screen – thus stopping you from having any idea where your team-mates are – unless you'd never played football before in your life?



FIRST IMPRESSIONS



As we have already mentioned, the front cover of *Street Gang Football* makes a promise that the main game doesn't have a hope in fulfilling. The *Warriors*-style box art does look vaguely enticing, though. Special marks must also be given to the unusual restraint that's been shown to this Codemasters' release as it's devoid of the usual 'this game is bloody amazing' comments the Darling Brothers usually placed on their games. Saying that, though, maybe it was an early indication that even the brothers knew they had a turd on their hands…

A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER

Yes, we know that *Street Gang Football* is complete and utter rubbish, but we're so hard we just don't care. We're aware that the tiny playing field makes it virtually impossible to work out what's going on when you have the ball and need to find your team-mates, and, yes, we know that there's no real difference between playing with a football or just kicking around a tin can; but so what? Let's face it – what are you going to do about it? Nothing, that's what. If you do complain about how rubbish our game is then we'll simply have to kick you resoundingly in the knackers and spit on you while you're down on the floor and blubbing like a little baby. Why? Because we're absolutely well 'ard, that's why.



THE MAKING OF...

PANZER DRAGOON 1&2



IN THE FIRST OF A TWO-PART LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PANZER DRAGOON SERIES' DEVELOPMENT, JONTI DAVIES CATCHES UP WITH EX-TEAM ANDROMEDA ARTIST **KENTARO YOSHIDA** TO EXAMINE THE CREATION OF A BRACE OF SPECTACULAR SATURN GAMES

After the limited success of its Mega Drive-related CD hardware projects in the early-Nineties, Sega found itself in competition with a newcomer – Sony, with its PlayStation console – and preparing for a battle in which the rules of combat were not immediately clear to the more established of the two parties. Still, by 1993, Sega's higher-ups had decided they wanted cutting-edge 3D games to form the crux of the early Saturn line-up. One of the teams established to produce such titles was christened 'Team Andromeda' and would, during its five-year existence, shape a unique game series matching the allure of 3D shoot-'em-ups with an otherworldly RPG context. Team Andromeda's work culminated in the legendary 1998-vintage *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, a scarce game whose monetary value today is expensive yet doesn't seem overpriced (such is the quality of the experience). But first, let's hitch a ride on dragonback and journey to the first game in the series: *Panzer Dragoon*.

Kentaro Yoshida is today studio director at Q-Games, the Kyoto outfit behind the retro-styled *PixelJunk* series of PSN games, but he began his working life at Sega. "When we started work on *Panzer Dragoon*, I was in my second year at Sega and just a lowly artist," Kentaro recalls. "For *Panzer Dragoon* I did texturing, modelling… things like that. I did a lot of work on the boss scenes, as well. We had a veteran art director on the team, and the producer was also an old hand. I became the art director for *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, but the concept art and movies were overseen by the previous art director, Manabu Kusunoki, who also did all of the dragon, character and world art in the original *Panzer Dragoon*."

In advance of the Saturn's arrival, Sega had begun to make changes to the structure of its internal teams. This was partly a response to changing technologies, but also a method of reinvigorating its pool of developers. Kentaro explains how Team Andromeda's make-up affected the production of *Panzer Dragoon*: "Team Andromeda and *Panzer Dragoon* were conceived at the same time. Everyone assigned to Andromeda was already working at Sega, but the team line-up was dictated by the fact that the Saturn hardware was quite a bit different from previous Sega consoles. With the Mega Drive, most of the [internal Sega] development teams were experienced

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** TEAM ANDROMEDA
» **RELEASED:** 1995 (PANZER DRAGOON), 1996 (PANZER DRAGOON ZWEI)
» **GENRE:** 3D SHOOT-'EM-UPS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5 FOR EACH GAME



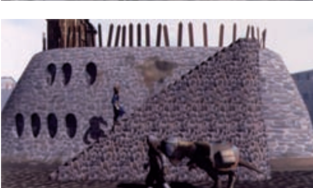




» **Above:** *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* began with your dragon grounded and galloping, but it would soon learn to fly.









Changing perspectives

The key differentiating factor between *Panzer Dragoon* and most other on-rails 3D shoot-'em-ups of the day is that Team Andromeda's game deigned to give the player freedom to aim and shoot in any direction. Kentaro Yoshida recalls that "Futatsugi, the main planner behind the controls, said, 'We've got to do this!' He wanted to make sure that *Panzer Dragoon* gave players something they hadn't experienced before, and he believed it was essential that players could look and aim anywhere and not have their shooting restricted. Of course, when the programmers heard about this design choice and imagined how many more calculations it would need, they didn't look too pleased [laughs]. But they went along with it and viewed it as a challenge, and I think it worked out fine in the end."

Indeed it did – in *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*. The aiming system in *Zwei* benefited from a redesign of the game's viewpoint, with the first game's multiple perspectives dropped in favour of a singularly better solution: "With *PD1* we really wanted to make the shooting mode of play happen in a first-person perspective so that you could feel as though it was actually you who was there," Kentaro says, "but with *Zwei* we wanted to show more of the dragon, pitching it in the middle of the screen and making it look more dynamic. In the end, *Zwei* was more fun to control because of this."



"Panzer Dragoon was at 20fps most of the time, but the programmers managed to engineer Zwei to 30fps, which made it feel much smoother to play" KENTARO ON THE BENEFITS OF SATURN PROGRAMMING EXPERIENCE

'consumer division' people. For Saturn games, though, many developers were brought across from the 'arcade division', and in Team Andromeda three of the main people – [art director] Manabu Kusunoki, [system programmer] Hidetoshi Takeshita and [main programmer] Junichi Suto – had always worked on arcade games… until the *Panzer Dragoon* project began. As a result of that, *Panzer Dragoon* was from the start intended as an arcade-style game. The people with the arcade development background had worked on games such as *OutRunners* and *Rail Chase*, which were 3D games that used 2D sprites, so with *Panzer Dragoon* they wanted to try making a 'real' 3D game. I don't think those of us who came from the Mega Drive side of things would have been able to do that so quickly [without the help of the arcade-experienced team members]."

The main challenges Team Andromeda faced during the development of the first *Panzer Dragoon* game were inevitably related to the timing of the project and unfamiliarity with the Saturn hardware. "The schedule we were working to was really tight," Kentaro says. "We actually ended up missing our deadline, which was set as the Japanese launch day of the Saturn hardware. At first we were on the same schedule as the team producing *Clockwork Knight*, but no matter how hard we worked there was no way we were going to be able to meet that deadline, so Sega ended up putting *Clockwork Knight* out first and releasing *Panzer Dragoon* some months later. Sega had wanted a launch line-up of *Clockwork Knight*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Panzer Dragoon*…"

It transpires that Team Andromeda only received prototype Saturn hardware partway through the development of *Panzer Dragoon*; initially, Andromeda's programmers had to get along by anticipating how the console was likely to perform. Kentaro elaborates: "At the beginning of *Panzer Dragoon*'s development, the Saturn hardware wasn't finalised and we didn't have any prototype consoles to test with. The artists were using Silicon Graphics' SoftImage, and the 3D graphics were programmed on workstations using OpenGL. After a while, we were finally able to send things across to the [debug] Saturn we'd received, but the transition was really difficult for the programmers. Of all of us, I'd say the programmers probably had the most difficult job, because of the volume of 3D work they had to get through. They used both of the Saturn's GPUs in tandem, but I'm not sure how well that really worked out… [laughs]. Early on, the frame rate was terribly low, but eventually they got it up to 20fps."

In spite of those difficulties, inside Team Andromeda (and, for that matter, the rest of Sega) there was complete confidence in the Saturn's supposed ability to win the imminent console war. "Sega was still really strong when Team Andromeda was formed and everyone there was certain that the Saturn would not be beaten by the PlayStation," Kentaro laughs and winces. "Everyone was determined to make sure Sega would win the battle. We thought we'd have no problem making games that were superior to PlayStation games."

Panzer Dragoon's on-rails style of play, propelling the player forwards into the screen while introducing enemy targets from all directions, would seem to have been an obvious evolution of the *Space Harrier* template, but Kentaro believes other games had a greater influence on the direction of the first *Panzer* game: "I suppose [*Space Harrier*] did have some influence on the design of *Panzer Dragoon*, but in terms of games as inspiration, probably Namco's *Starblade*, Nintendo's *Star Fox*, and Taito's 2D shoot-'em-



» Dragoon's distinctive dragons are a world away from the European archtypes we're more familiar with.

» *Panzer Dragoon* was the most technically impressive Saturn title on the Japanese market in March 1995.

ups – particularly *RayForce* – had more of a bearing on how *Panzer* was put together. Team Andromeda was full of shoot-'em-up fans – our programmers were especially into [shmups]. When they got tired of coding, they'd take a break from *Panzer* and play high-score competitions on [Toaplan shmup] *Slap Fight* on the Mega Drive. We also played *Puyo Puyo* a lot during *Panzer*'s development…"

Thanks to its score (penned by a Japanese composer who had produced a series of Krautrock-inspired albums during the Eighties) and its cinematic cut-scenes, *Panzer Dragoon* was able to make an early break into territory outside the confines of traditional games, and in the process an altogether un-game-like world was created. The classic shoot-'em-ups Kentaro mentions certainly helped to shape *Panzer*'s style of play, but he reveals that other factors played equally significant roles: "I think there were all sorts of things that had an influence on *Panzer Dragoon*: particularly anime and films. The concept is completely different, but I'd say the production style of *Star Wars* was definitely influential – you know, how it made an unearthly world appear so real… Also, we were determined to avoid going down the same path as the sci-fi anime that was considered cool at the time – *Gundam*, for example, with its big robots – and we certainly didn't want to follow *Final Fantasy*'s lead, where you'd have characters waving impossibly big swords. Kusunoki was adamant that he didn't want any *Final Fantasy*-style unusual haircuts like [gestures a Cloud-like spike] or purple hair or anything like that," Kentaro laughs. "We wanted to do something closer to reality… with just a normal-looking person as the protagonist."

The *Panzer Dragoon* series' protagonists certainly are quite 'normal-looking', but the overall visual style of the games – the environments and the dragons, in particular – is distinctly odd, although according to Kentaro it wasn't always like that: "The first presentation video we put together featured a classically European-style green dragon, a pretty typical kind of dragon. However, we later changed the look of the dragon completely because we wanted to make it more sci-fi. Kusunoki decided to push the art direction in a slightly Turkish-looking, Ottoman style, because everyone was already familiar with the more European aesthetics [and he wanted *Panzer Dragoon* to look different from other games]."

Ottoman and science-fiction influences accounted for, *Panzer Dragoon*'s cultural mélange is confused even further by the obviously German theme of the *Panzer Dragoon* games' titles. "I think Futatsugi was a big fan of German names," Kentaro explains. Yukio Futatsugi is also the Team Andromeda member credited with constructing the unique language heard in the *Panzer Dragoon* games – but why did he choose to develop an original language for the games in the first place? "If the games had used Japanese language," Kentaro says, "well, Japanese people at the time didn't really think of their language as a cool thing… And if the characters had been speaking English, the games would have seemed too American, too close to Hollywood. So Futatsugi wanted something completely different and decided to make his own language. Also, there was a famous anime film called *Oneamis No Tsubasa* [English title: *Royal Space Force: The Wings Of Honneamise*] that used its own language, and we all thought that was really excellent…"

Other artistic influences came to the fore in *Panzer Dragoon*, even though the same influences were scaled back in *Zwei*. Specifically, the first game's on-rails, set-route nature of play enabled Team Andromeda to successfully commission a noted composer-producer to create a score that was perfectly in sync with the game's own cadences. Yoshitaka

Little dragons

There were a few non-Saturn *Panzer Dragoon* games released before the turn of the century. In 1996, Sega released a primitive *Panzer Dragoon* game for Tiger Electronics' stillborn R-Zone handheld. Also, a Windows 95 conversion of the first *Panzer Dragoon* game appeared in Japan in March 1997 – steeply priced at 8,800yen (about £50) – featuring a new Replay mode that enabled players to review their performances post-level. Less impressive (but more intriguing) was *Panzer Dragoon Mini*, a Game Gear production released in November 1996. Kentaro Yoshida is quick to absolve Team Andromeda of any responsibility for *Mini*, laughing as he explains that: "No one from Team Andromeda had anything to do with that! It didn't have the atmosphere of a *Panzer Dragoon* game and it wasn't very interesting." *Mini* offers a choice of three colour-coded dragons at the outset (Black, Red and Blue) but features no riders, and while it manages some faked side-on perspectives *Mini* is stripped of the attacking freedom of the Saturn games. Despite its relative lack of gameplay merit and complete disregard for the series' story, *Panzer Dragoon Mini* is something of a rarity and tends to fetch up to 15,000yen (£80) on Japan's Yahoo! Auctions.

"Kusunoki was adamant that he didn't want any Final Fantasy-style unusual haircuts… or purple hair or anything like that"

KENTARO ON TEAM ANDROMEDA'S SEARCH FOR A 'NORMAL-LOOKING' PROTAGONIST

Azuma had already produced half-a-dozen albums of soundtrack-style music during the Eighties, informed by ambient and Germany's Krautrock movement – but *Panzer Dragoon* was his sensational videogame debut. "For the music in *Panzer Dragoon*, we gave Azuma a detailed explanation of the timing of the game's levels," Kentaro explains. "We'd write notes – things like, 'The boss appears 30 seconds on from here' or 'Water appears at this point' – to give him an impression of how each level progressed, from start to finish. That's why the music matches the pace of the game so precisely. We didn't do the same thing with *Zwei*, though; just with the first game. I seem to remember this was because we introduced branching levels in *Zwei*, which would have made that process impossible to replicate…"

Another factor adding to the mystique of *Panzer Dragoon* was its cover art, which was famously supplied by French artist Moebius: "Everyone at Team Andromeda was a fan of Moebius," Kentaro says, "so we asked him to do the artwork for the packaging of *Panzer Dragoon*. For *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, we just used some computer-generated images – probably because Moebius was too expensive to commission twice [laughs]."

With *Panzer Dragoon* out of the door by March 1995 (four months after the Saturn's Japanese launch), Team Andromeda's attentions turned immediately to the development of two very different new games: an advanced 3D shoot-'em-up in *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, and an RPG with shooting elements in the form of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. As Kentaro explains, Team Andromeda expanded to cope with the demands of producing two new games concurrently: "We made *Zwei* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga* at the same time. Team Andromeda was split down the middle, effectively becoming two teams. Kusunoki and Futatsugi led the *Saga* side of things, and quite a few new artists and programmers joined them, while we worked on *Zwei*. We all knew that making an RPG would take more time than producing another shoot-'em-up, so *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* was designed to be released before *Saga*. The original *Panzer Dragoon* took us a year and a few months to develop, but *Zwei* was quite a bit quicker to produce – it didn't even take a full 12 months – because we already had the engine in place from the first game."

Panzer Dragoon was ahead of its time, but in some respects suffered for how adventurous it was: *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, on the other hand, benefited enormously from the experience Team Andromeda had gained in developing the first game. It also reworked the basics of *Panzer Dragoon*, introducing features such as dragon evolution and multiple paths through levels, in turn adding a layer of depth to the game's formula that is notably missing from the original *Panzer Dragoon*. *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*'s branching levels, Kentaro explains, were the idea of the game's director, Tomohiro Kondo – "He wanted users to be able to enjoy more variety in the game." We ask whether Tomohiro Kondo had anything to do with *OutRunners* – perhaps that's where the inspiration came from? "Kondo was from a 'consumer division' background; only Takeshita had worked on *OutRunners*… But maybe the influence of *OutRun* seeped in a little here," Kentaro laughs.

"As well as the branching courses," Kentaro continues, "in *Zwei* we put a lot of effort into introducing dragons that would develop and evolve. I think that was a really good feature, because it meant that players could have their own individual experiences with the game. I seem to remember Futatsugi came up with the idea of evolving dragons, and he wanted it to feature in both *Saga* and *Zwei*. Another important improvement in *Zwei* was the frame rate. *Panzer Dragoon* was at 20 frames per second most of the time, but the programmers managed to engineer *Zwei* to 30fps, which made the game feel much smoother to play."

But it wasn't just the technical accomplishment of *Zwei* that put it a level up from the original *Panzer Dragoon*: the art direction was also more refined, nicely preparing players for the mesmerising world of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, which would appear in 1998. "For *Zwei*, Kusunoki wanted to set a slightly darker tone," Kentaro says, "and we were joined by a couple of talented youngsters, one of whom was an artist called Ryuta Ueda, who went on to become the art director on *Jet Set Radio*. He had lots of original ideas that he wanted to see in the *Panzer Dragoon* world, and the more dynamic boss designs in *Zwei* were partly thanks to his abilities."

We ask Kentaro if he can remember how *Panzer Dragoon* and *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* were received by Japan's premier games magazine, *Famitsu*, but he draws a blank: "I really can't remember… I think it got a decent score," he laughs. (For the record, *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* was awarded a highly respectable 35 out of 40 (9, 8, 10, 8) by *Famitsu*'s reviewers back in 1996.) Kentaro is more concerned with the favourable reaction of fellow Japanese developers, though: "Even today, many Japanese developers still play the *Panzer Dragoon* games. Our boss had hoped for more sales than *Panzer Dragoon* achieved – but it can't have performed that badly because we got the go-ahead for *Zwei* and *Saga* straightaway…"

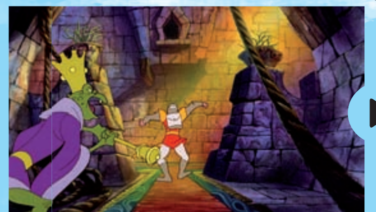




» *Panzer Dragoon*'s seas looked reasonably watery, but *Zwei* did the same trick much better.



A brief history of games featuring dragons



Dragon's Lair (Cinematronics, 1983)
This (in)famous pioneering Laserdisc game got the dragon ball rolling with its casting of Singe as the archenemy of our heroic Dirk. *Dragon's Lair* was inevitably all about the visual impact of FMV at a time when you could normally count sprites using an abacus.



Dragon Slayer (Falcom, 1984)
Nihon Falcom's long and winding *Dragon Slayer* series is an excellent example of dragons being associated with RPGs from the East. It's also a typical example of dragons being cast as the villains of the piece, unlike the *Panzer Dragoon* series in which they act as your friends.



Thanatos (Durell, 1986)
Thanatos instantly impressed upon its release thanks to its huge animated sprites, solid gameplay and the fact you got to play as a bloody big dragon. While you could breath fire on pesky villagers it was far more fun to pick them up in your claws and drop them instead.



Saint Dragon (Jaleco, 1989)
Jaleco's *Saint Dragon* coin-op puts you in control of a metallic dragon in a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up context. It's a bit like Taito's *Syvalion*, which appeared in 1988, in that you're controlling a dragon's head, with a tail following behind (as tails have a habit of doing).



» The series' cut-scenes were of an appropriate length and frequency, adding to the experience rather than getting in the way.

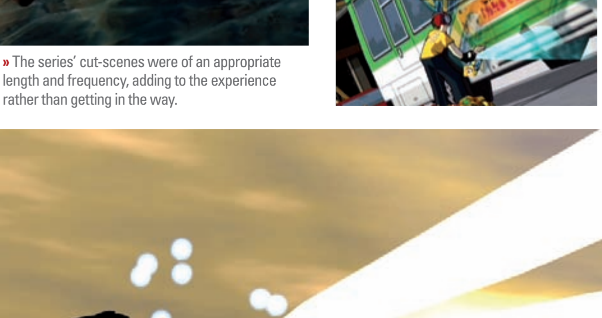
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR: 1998

JET SET RADIO (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2000

PANZER DRAGOON ORTA
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2002





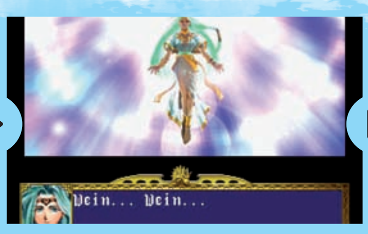
» Occasion for full 360-degree rotation gave the *Panzer Dragoon* games a unique twist.







The King Of Dragons (Capcom, 1991)
This solid scrolling beat-'em-up pitches a dragon called Gildiss as your archenemy. *The King Of Dragons* also offers a choice of five characters with which to slay the dragon. The game was born in the arcades, but it's also on *Capcom Classics Collection Vol 2* on the PS2/Xbox.



Dragon Force (Sega, 1996)
Dragons don't feature too heavily in this Japanese Saturn RPG, but as the title suggests you do get to use their power to defeat enemy units. The only English-language version was released in the US by Working Designs, who did a typically excellent job with the translation.

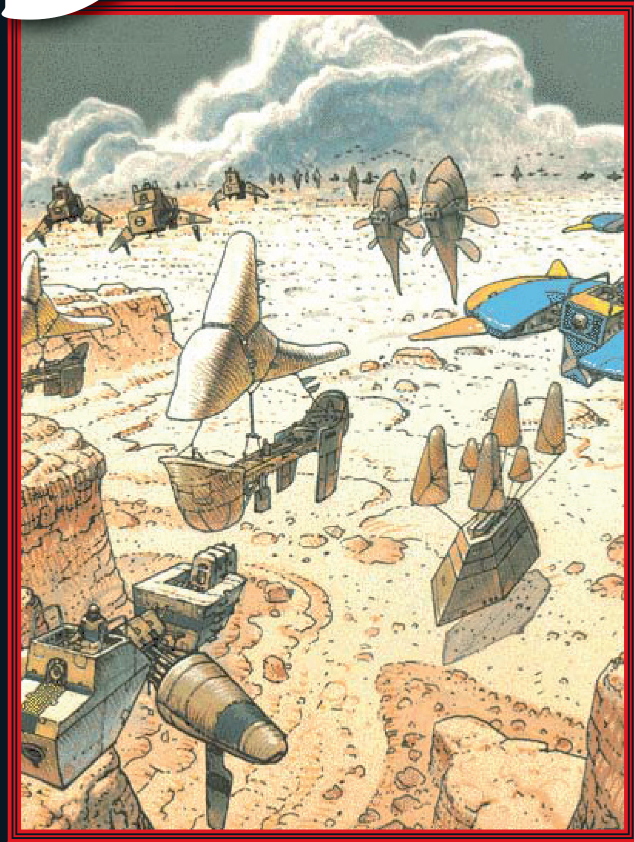


Spyro The Dragon (Insomniac, 1998)
Back when 3D platformers/collect-'em-ups were as common as indistinguishable FPSs are today, *Spyro The Dragon* was seen by N64 owners as a *Super Mario 64* rip-off. PlayStation gamers, however, found a charming game with a purple dragon as its unlikely star.



Panzer Dragoon Orta (Smilebit, 2002)
Orta is the ultimate in dragon-piloting 3D shoot-'em-ups. Kentaro Yoshida had left Sega after the disbandment of Team Andromeda, but he returned just to work on this Xbox marvel as a one-off assignment. Dragons have never looked better.

Panzer Dragoon GALLERY


Panzer Dragoon Year Released: 1995


Panzer Dragoon II Zwei Year Released: 1996


Panzer Dragoon Saga Year Released: 1998


Panzer Dragoon Year Released: 1995



Panzer Dragoon Mini Year Released: 1996



Panzer Dragoon II Zwei Year Released: 1996



Panzer Dragoon Saga Year Released: 1998



Panzer Dragoon Orta Year Released: 2002

FUTURE SPY

AN UNDERPLAYED CLASSIC IF EVER WE'VE OVERPLAYED ONE



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £300+



HISTORY

Despite being one of Sega's earliest coin-ops, I first discovered *Future Spy* almost 25 years after its release on the PS2. If you own a copy of *Sega Mega Drive Collection*, then, along with the 30+ Mega Drive games Sega crammed inside that pack, there are a few ancient arcade games to unlock, too – one of which happens to be *Future Spy*.

Future Spy looked very similar to Sega's 45-degree shmup *Zaxxon*, which was released two years earlier, but with the point of visual difference being that *Zaxxon*'s intergalactic theme is supplanted for a more contemporary setting. In *Future Spy* you play a secret agent who's been slotted inside the cockpit of a futuristic F-15 and tasked with surviving an onslaught of enemy planes, choppers, subs and turrets.

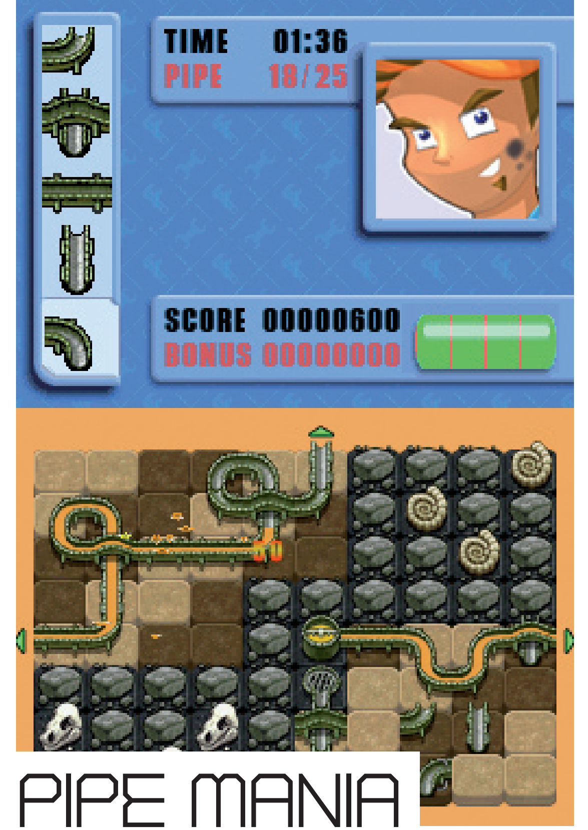
Another element that set *Future Spy* apart from *Zaxxon* was the fact your plane's altitude always stayed the same. It can't descend or climb, so, unlike *Zaxxon*, you don't have to continuously keep an eye on the shadow cast by your steel bird to get your bearings. But don't think that made the game any easier – instead of your hawk-like silhouette you'll need to be on the lookout for circular defence radars that appear in the sky to warn you of the blast radius of fired enemy missiles. On top of that you also have to watch your *Xevious*-like cross hairs, which scratches the surface of the ground to indicate where your deployed bombs will land. So, with a myriad of enemies, two radars and a plane to keep your peepers on, the action can get pretty hairy very quickly.

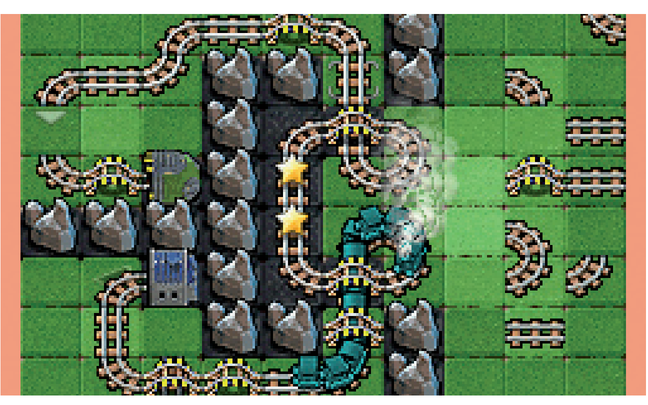
The isometric perspective, while often imitated (*Return Of The Jedi* and *Viewpoint*) is used far more innovatively here. *Future Spy* uses the perspective to marry destroy and evade gameplay fantastically. And while initially it feels like the game is giving you a lot to juggle, in the throes of chaos, practice prevails and things fall into place brilliantly. If you're a fan of *Zaxxon*, or isometric shooters, you should take some time to take *Future Spy* for a spin.


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© SEGA 1984

RETRORATED

There may be a brand new DS on the way, but there's still plenty of life in the DS Lite if this month's issue is anything to go by. The classic puzzler *Pipe Mania* makes a welcome return, while Treasure's *Bangai-O Spirits* proves some games are definately worth waiting for.





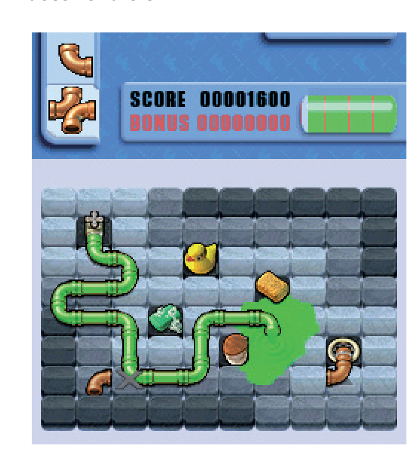


PIPE MANIA

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** EMPIRE INTERACTIVE
» **DEVELOPER:** RAZORWORKS SOFTWARE
» **COST:** £19.99

There's a staggering amount of puzzle games now available on the DS, so a new release has to be very special in order to stand out from its many peers. Fortunately, the excellent *Pipe Mania* is just that – although being the follow-up to the enjoyable 8 and 16-bit puzzler certainly doesn't hurt it.



Set some 19 years after the original, *Pipe Mania* retains the classic gameplay of old, but interjects it with plenty of new gameplay mechanics and ideas.

Pipe Mania does have a semblance of a story, but thankfully it's nowhere near as intrusive as *Jewel Quest*'s. After earning his millions in the original game, Alfonso the plumber bought the Isle of Ducts with plans of starting his own nation, only to discover that the island was a mess of leaky pipes due to the lousy plumbing efforts of Buffalo Bonzo. Fortunately, Alfonso's son Junior and daughter Fawcett are on hand to clean up Bill's mess in the form of a huge selection of different game modes.

World mode is by far the biggest on offer and gives you 56 increasingly devious puzzles to work your way through. Admittedly things start off pretty simple, with Junior and Fawcett needing to do little more than construct a simple pipeline for a never-ending supply of flooze to run through, but by the time you reach the railroad you'll be both cursing and complimenting the sheer fiendishness that faces you.

Successfully plough through World mode and even more modes await you, ensuring that it's going to be many hours before you finally see everything *Pipe Mania* has to offer. Bonus mode is effectively a series of short puzzles that require you to either spin pre-laid pipe pieces or lay down pieces within a strict time limit, while Arcade requires you to deal with both the laying of pipes and a constantly scrolling environment (lose the flooze off the edge of the screen and it's game over). Best of all though is Classic mode, which includes every single level, perfectly replicated, from the original game and is bound to get the nostalgia juices flowing.

While *Pipe Mania* is available on a variety of systems none of them hold a candle to the brilliant DS effort, mainly because none of them allow you to plop a pipe piece down with the simple tap of a stylus. It greatly speeds up (and improves) *Pipe Mania*'s gameplay and as a result makes it far more accessible than it's ever been before.

Beautifully polished and at an excellent price point, this is the perfect example of how to update an old classic. Sure the cutesy characters, irritating soundtrack and trite storyline isn't going to appeal to everyone, but if you can look past these little hindrances you'll discover a wonderfully absorbing title that's worth £20 of anyone's money.





BANGAI-O SPIRITS

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** D3 PUBLISHING
» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
» **COST:** £24.99

Treasure once said that it would never make sequels to its games. Luckily, we don't mind this particular developer bending the truth as *Bangai-O Spirits* is the greatest shooter/puzzler to ever appear on Nintendo's handheld.

Indeed, the beauty of *Bangai-O Spirits*' 160 amazingly designed levels is that you never know quite what you're going to get. One minute your robot's kicking footballs into hordes of enemies, the next he's trying to reach a checkpoint before it's closed off to him. Then there's the huge choice of weapons, from baseball bats to bouncing bombs, with the powerful EX attacks also filling the screen with a wide array of missiles.

Add in the edit mode, which lets you edit existing stages or create your own from scratch, the ability to swap levels, replays and scores by converting them into sound files and you have one of the cleverest and most addictive titles to appear on the Nintendo DS.

93%

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** BIOWARE
» **COST:** £29.99

Retro Gamer once said that BioWare wouldn't be able to make a bad game, even if the developer was held at gunpoint. Although we still hold firm with that rather bold statement, our faith has been a little shaken by the company's latest adventure.

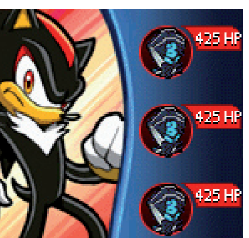
While there are many elements in place that fans of the developer will instantly recognise – parties consisting of a multitude of characters, an innovative combat system and some fantastic aesthetics – the storyline behind *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* is surprisingly lacking. Granted, you could argue that *Sonic* isn't known for its gritty dialogue, but surely this was the perfect opportunity for Sega to get its mascot back on track?

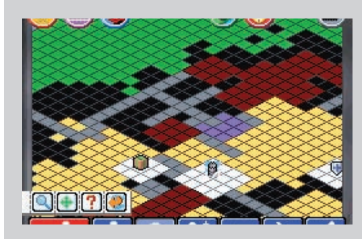
Don't get us wrong, *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* isn't a crushing disappointment by any means, and it makes for a thoroughly engaging – if rather short – adventure, but considering the talent involved, we were looking for something with a little more substance.











SIMCITY CREATOR

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **DEVELOPER:** MAXIS
» **COST:** £29.99

After the disappointing *SimCity* on the DS, we had a few concerns over this sequel, fearing that it would feature the same fiddly interface and dismally dull scenarios. Happily this isn't the case, and new options like the challenge mode – which allows you to create cities in different time periods – keep the gameplay fresh and entertaining. It's still all too easy to make the odd slip (thank God for the 'Undo' feature), but this is a massive improvement on the original outing.

75%



JEWEL QUEST: EXPEDITIONS

» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION VALUE
» **DEVELOPER:** IWIN
» **COST:** £19.99

We've lost count of the number of puzzle games that have been improved by the DS's touch screen, but here's another to add to the pile. Ignore the pointless story mode and simply enjoy the 180 included puzzles. Granted, there's nothing here that you've not seen before on the DS, but the level of polish impresses, while it's difficult to argue with the £20 price tag. Fans of *Zoo Keeper* and *Bejeweled* should definitely take a gander.

71%

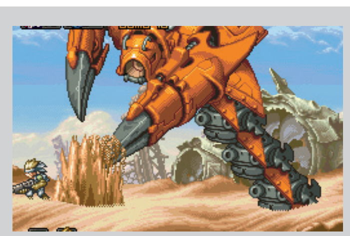


MYSTERY DUNGEON: SHIREN THE WANDERER

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** CHUNSOFT
» **COST:** £29.99

A jazzed-up remake of a Japanese SNES game, *Mystery Dungeon* is an excellent 'rogue-like' (named after old text adventure *Rogue*) that will delight as many players as it repels. If you don't like the idea of an RPG that sends you back to Level 1 when you die then *Mystery Dungeon* isn't for you. But if you want an adventure that always evolves, has a multitude of items to discover and is different every time you play then track this down.

88%



COMMANDO: STEEL DISASTER

» **PUBLISHER:** LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT
» **DEVELOPER:** MANA COMP SOFT
» **COST:** £29.99

If, like us, you're still waiting for *Metal Slug* on the DS, then check out this great shooter. Shamelessly mimicking SNK's franchise, *Commando: Steel Disaster* is an excellent little blaster with huge bosses, big tanks and… everything else you can find in *Metal Slug*. It's also amazingly hard, but hey, so is *Metal Slug*. The insane difficulty will put many off, but persevere and you'll find an absorbing blaster that will please run-'n'-gun fans immensely.

73%





CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** 2K GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** FIRAXIS GAMES
- » **COST:** £29.99

Civilization Revolution is like hacking a classic film down to ten minutes: there's some greatness, but it's a pale shadow of the original concept.

With this brave but futile attempt to cram *Civilization* on to the DS, all initially seems well. The core gameplay appears intact, but soon you realise the game's been neutered to make everything faster: the war-obsessed AI forces games towards unit movement and conquest, rather than long-term strategy, and the tiny view area also hampers play.

Despite these gripes, *Civ Rev* has its good points. If you want a 'Civ Lite' to play on the bus – due to 'proper' *Civ* demanding too much time – this largely succeeds. Drop your expectations accordingly, and you'll find a fun, fast-paced game, with built-in scenarios increasing longevity and balancing the simple gameplay. Just don't expect this to replace your PC-based *Civ* games, or you'll be disappointed.

70%

FINAL FANTASY IV

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **DEVELOPER:** MATRIX SOFTWARE
- » **COST:** £29.99

If this month's *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* has left you hungry for more role-playing game shenanigans then you definitely need to pick up Square Enix's most recent remake as it's every bit as good as *Final Fantasy III*.

While it's a shameless remake of the original Super Nintendo game – albeit one with some incredibly sumptuous looking visuals, polished voice acting and a few brand new gameplay mechanics – it still manages to stand head and shoulders above many other Nintendo DS offerings.

Yes, the story on offer is the same tale that you'll find in any other Japanese RPG, but unlike this month's *Sonic Chronicles*, it never feels forced. The same can be said for the way you're gently eased into things such as the combat, everything here moves along like finely oiled machinery (hardly surprising really as it's been around now for 17 years since its SNES release).

Final Fantasy IV doesn't do anything new, but what it does do it does exceptionally well. God knows if *FFV* will be receiving the same makeover, but we'll definitely be buying it if it does.







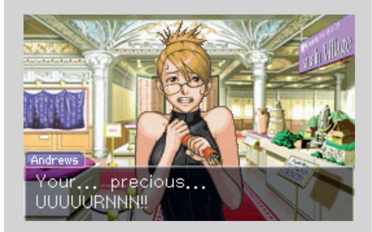


SPORE CREATURES

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** MAXIS
- » **COST:** £29.99

Spore was always going to be a risky project to transfer over to the Nintendo DS, but it's still surprising just how much has been lost from Will Wright's recent PC hit. What you essentially have here is the second section of the PC game with a tacked-on storyline that sees you chasing after your slug-like friend. Sure the included level editor is impressive, but there's just not enough here to sink your constantly evolving teeth into. Stick with the PC original instead.

51%



PHOENIX WRIGHT: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- » **COST:** £29.99

After witnessing the adventures of Apollo Justice, this third *Phoenix Wright* chapter definitely feels like it's in need of being closed. Although the dialogue is as sharp as always, the basic game mechanics are now beginning to feel a little bit stale, while the various cases are now starting to feel just a little too predictable. It remains a great point-and-click adventure, it's just a shame the latest title in the series was released first…

70%



VIVA PIÑATA: POCKET PARADISE

- » **PUBLISHER:** THQ
- » **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- » **COST:** £29.99

Resource management games are as old as the hills, but rarely have they been put together as well as *Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise*. Skilfully cramming the original 360 game on to a DS is impressive enough, but Rare has also added an interface system that makes its big brother look archaic. Some may baulk at the cuteness, and the garden your Piñatas inhabit can get a bit cramped, but you'll be having such a good time you won't actually notice.

91%



ANKH: CURSE OF THE SCARAB KING

- » **PUBLISHER:** XIDER
- » **DEVELOPER:** VIS
- » **COST:** £19.99

Considering how well suited the genre is to the DS, there's a real lack of point-and-click games available. Step forward *Ankh*, a cut-down port of the PC title from a few years back, which is hoping to find a new audience on the DS. Sadly, despite some good voice acting, *Ankh* is hindered by obtuse puzzles, fiddly controls and the DS's low-res screen, which makes trying to identify available items very frustrating. Enjoyable, but not essential.

61%

REVIEW

WORLD HEROES ANTHOLOGY

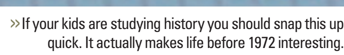
IGNITION INDULGES IN SOME TIME-TRAVELLING PUMMELLING

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** PS2
- **PRICE:** £19.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** IGNITION
- **PLAYERS:** 2






» If your kids are studying history you should snap this up quick. It actually makes life before 1972 interesting.

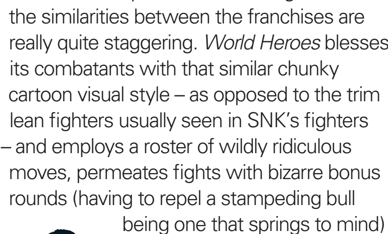


» *World Heroes* boasts some ridiculously over the top moves, especially old Ra-ra-Rasputin.



There are many things we'd do if we had the benefit of a time machine. We'd buy a sport almanac, take up betting, become filthy stinking rich and then feed all the cash into loss-making arcades-cum-animal-petting zoos across the world. But coming in at around 300 on our list would be the idea of travelling through time, kidnapping notable people from history and then forcing them to fight in a tournament to the death. Incidentally, in at number 299 would be kidnapping notable people from history, forcing them to watch *You Don't Mess With The Zohan* and then returning them from where they came.

World Heroes is probably the most underrated and underappreciated fighting series ever. The game is often described as SNK's closest parallel to *Street Fighter II*, and the similarities between the franchises are really quite staggering. *World Heroes* blesses its combatants with that similar chunky cartoon visual style – as opposed to the trim lean fighters usually seen in SNK's fighters – and employs a roster of wildly ridiculous moves, permeates fights with bizarre bonus rounds (having to repel a stampeding bull being one that springs to mind) and features two Ryu and Ken-alike fighters who each have an unashamed variation of the Dragon Punch.



The underpinning premise of the series centres on a mad scientist, called Dr Brown, who's built a time machine and gathered the greatest warriors from history, so that he can watch them duke it out. As a result, all the fighters are themed on characters from history. Rasputin, Jean D'Arc, Bruce Lee, Joe Montana and even Hulk Hogan are just some of the people who feature, and it's this quirky roster of overblown characters along with their special moves that many will find most endearing about the games.

As far as the quality and enjoyment that each game brings to the table, *World Heroes* and *World Heroes 2* – although nice to have in the pack – feel superseded somewhat by the excellent *World Heroes 2 Jet*. *World Heroes Perfect*, the series' swan song, however, feels individual enough (it adds 'Hero' and 'Desperation' moves to the mix and ramps up the graphics and animation) to feel like a standalone game. To be honest, *Jet* and *Perfect* are good enough in their own right to warrant the purchase. Sure, the *World Heroes* games may not demonstrate the balance of *Garou*, or the depth and variety of *King Of Fighters*, but they still make up an enjoyable family of brawlers. If you're looking for a cheap and easy way to enter the *World Heroes* series, then look no further. A complete collection for a knockout price, what's not to recommend.





OPINION

Sorry, but this pack doesn't really do anything for me. I'm really particular when it comes to my fighting games and I've never been a fan of the *World Heroes* series. I'm not particularly impressed by any of the available fighters on offer, while the mechanics themselves are rather stale. In short I'd rather play something from the *King Of Fighters* series, as it's more to my liking. It's nice to see SNK Playmore delivering a complete package for fans of the original, but I'm holding out for the *Samurai Shodown* series instead.

Darran Jones





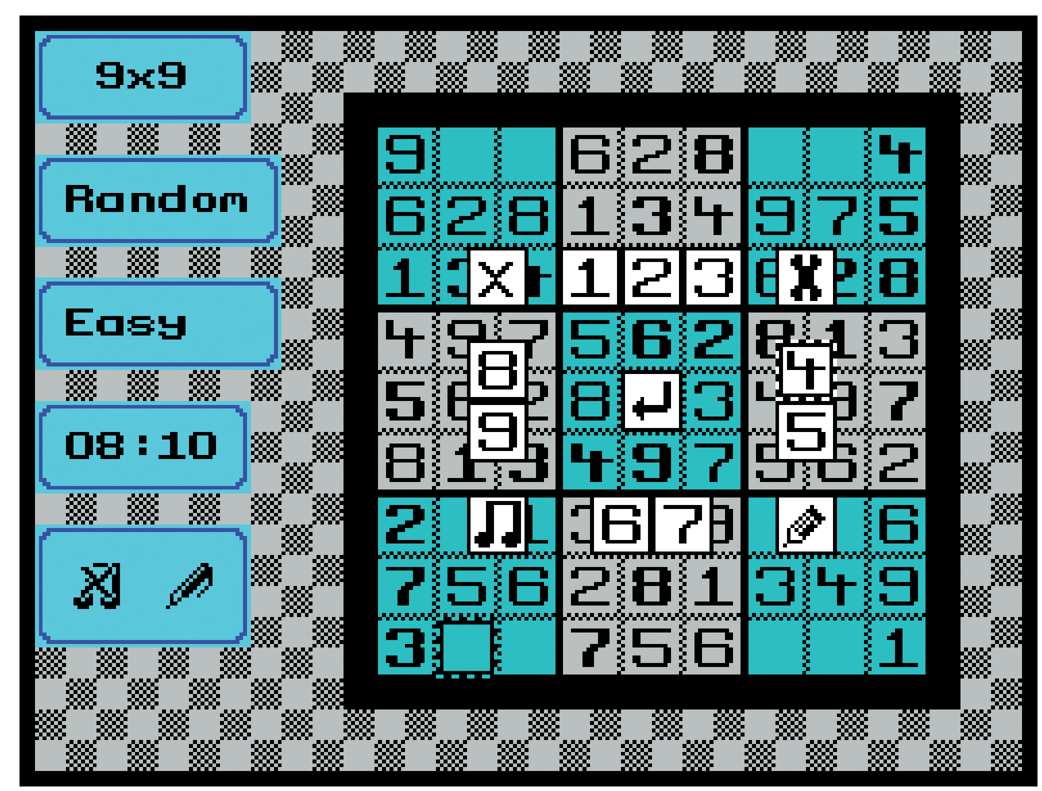


HOMEBREW RATED

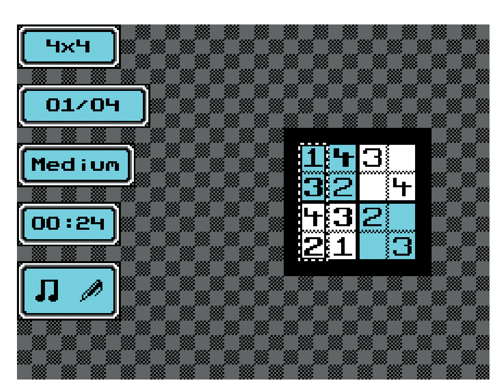
SPECTRUM AND CPC MATHEMATICAL PUZZLES FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

SUDOKU

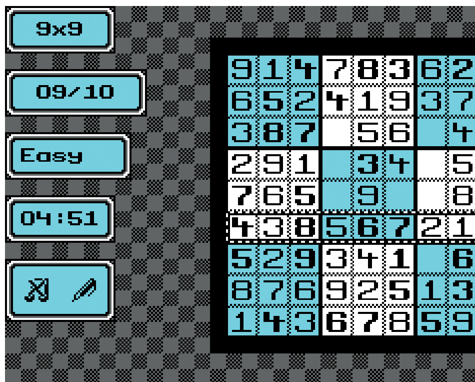
NINE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER… SQUARE



» It may not look fantastic, but there's no real reason for it to.



» *Sudoku* has a good selection of different puzzles for all abilities.



» One from the top please, Carol.



FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC AND SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: KEVIN THACKER
LINK: WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: £1.75 (EMULATOR IMAGE) OR £2.99 (CASSETTE)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Although rapidly approaching its 30th birthday, Sudoku (or Number Place as it was originally titled by inventor Howard Garns) has enjoyed incredible success over the last few years, first in Japan and then worldwide to the point where those now familiar nine by nine cell grids even sit alongside crosswords on tabloid puzzle pages. For those whose Outer Mongolian cave still doesn't have broadband, players are presented with a grid of squares which has been partially populated. Their task is to fill the remaining spaces with values from one to nine, avoiding any repetitions of a number within any row, column or three by three cell segment and working around all of the fixed digits present when the puzzle began.

Since solving Sudoku puzzles involves both logic and mathematics, they're very much suited to computers so, along with several PC iterations and even interactive DVD games, there have already been several attempts at producing an 8-bit version. This particular implementation was started three years ago and originally intended by developer Kevin Thacker to be a tool for solving puzzles, and his personal interest in Sudoku shows through in the sheer number of features available here. The original program for solving puzzles is retained within the game menus, along with two control modes, options for selection of either randomly generated or preset challenges at easy, medium or hard difficulty levels and an editor to allow players to create their own puzzles. There are also features such as the ability to resize the grid from just four by four squares up to a massive and somewhat daunting twelve by twelve, a selection of helpful tools such as the option to leave 'pencil marks' in cells (where a highlighted dot among a group temporarily represents a number) rather than writing in a final decision, and the current state of the grid can be stashed away as a save point and reverted to should things go squiffy. The game rather helpfully highlights any choices that don't fit in as well as lines and segments as they're completed as well.

Despite the release on two platforms, no real concessions are made in either version apart from the slightly higher resolution of the chosen CPC display mode, which results in it being a little less colourful. Since the graphics are reasonable but more functional than anything else, this relatively minor cosmetic difference means there isn't much to choose between the two versions visually. Similarly, the music is well suited to the slower, more thoughtful pace of the game, but, as long as an AY-equipped Spectrum is used (otherwise the game is silent), again it's nigh-on impossible to tell the two of them apart. *Sudoku* is well stocked with options and, with those three difficulty levels and the random puzzle feature, it should offer something of a challenge to more experienced players, while Number Place virgins can first test the water with the easy mode or a reduced grid size before moving on to the conventional puzzles.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 92% Lots of difficulty settings and a couple of control modes.
AESTHETICS: 84% Nicely presented, with some nice tunes in the background.
PLAYABILITY: 88% As long as players understand Sudoku, it's easy to get into.
LONGEVITY: 92% A good selection of puzzles.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 89% Cheaper and longer lasting than a puzzle book!
OVERALL: 89%

IT'S EITHER A CASE OF GETTING THAT SINKING FEELING OR BREAKING AND ENTERING!

SUB HUNTER

TIME TO RUN SILENT, RUN DEEP

Sinister governmental bodies have been at work again, dumping illegal mutagenic chemicals into the sea as part of a cover-up. Now the coast guards are receiving reports of swimmers going missing and huge aquatic creatures attacking shipping, so the player, adopting the role of the titular Sub Hunter, must take to the high seas in a small but manoeuvrable battle sub, rescuing as many swimmers as possible while avoiding or taking out the evil mutants.

The game is divided into sub missions (if you'll excuse the pun), some of which involve wading in while others require a bit more thought. Despite initial appearances *Sub Hunter* isn't a straight shoot-'em-up and simply letting fly will get you nowhere fast.

The basis for *Sub Hunter* was the VIC-20 version of Mastertronic's *Sub Hunt*. The C64 conversion was poor and the plan was initially to right that wrong. But, as the project went on and more elements were added, what began as a simple underwater blaster became a far more rounded game. It's also nicely presented, designer Frank Gasking has done a superb job visually and Thomas 'Drax' Mogensen's music fits nicely. And surprisingly, programmer Richard Bayliss, whose reputation is less than stellar among C64 gamers, has produced something fun to play that should be considered by anybody who likes thought with their blasting action.

FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: FRANK GASKING AND RICHARD BAYLISS
LINK: WWW.BINARYZONE.ORG/PSYTRONIK.PHP
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: £3.99 (CASSETTE)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK





» Dumping toxic waste in the sea? It'll never catch on.



» It may seem like a straight shooter, but there's a lot more to it.



» *Sub Hunter* is the thinking man's action game.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 84% Intro, loading picture and music or sound effect options.
AESTHETICS: 93% Excellent music and some great visuals.
PLAYABILITY: 93% Multiple game styles, meaning lots of variety.
LONGEVITY: 85% A very involving game.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 91% Action game fans can't go wrong at these prices.
OVERALL: 90%

HEIST

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T MAKE A GAME ABOUT ROBBERY?

Welcome to the exciting and dangerous world of serial bank robbery!

The process of robbing a bank is divided into five stages, presented here as mini-games. Infiltration involves climbing ladders from the ground floor to the roof, cracking the vault is a matter of stopping the combination wheels on the right numbers, grabbing the loot sees our villain haring around the vault to grab dollar signs, while avoiding exploding dye packs and escaping is a matter of shooting the cop at the exit, diving into the car and driving up a back road to the hideout. Successfully completing a job encourages your gang to chance their arm with another bank.

Unfortunately, *Heist* doesn't really manage to be more than the sum of these rather simple parts. The vault combination and police shoot-out are reaction tests, getaway driving and grabbing the loot are both reminiscent of early-Eighties magazine type-in games and the infiltration, in particular, can be hugely frustrating since the player must use ladders to move from platform to platform but some of them are 'fake'. There's no visual clue as to which ladder isn't real, so finding out is a matter of painful trial and error as the robber climbs one and then loses a life as they plunge, screaming to the ground below. *Heist* is initially quite enjoyable but with no noticeable increase in difficulty between successive raids and that rather annoying first level the game can't really hold interest for very long.



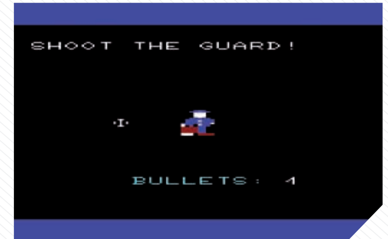
FORMAT: UNEXPANDED VIC-20
DEVELOPED BY: JEFF DANIELS
LINK: WWW.SLEEPINGELEPHANT.COM/DENIAL
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



» Good fun initially, but *Heist* soon gets a little tired.



» Take the money and get the hell out.



» You'll never take me alive, copper!

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 63% Good control options and a high-score table.
AESTHETICS: 64% Simple backgrounds and effects with some nice sprites.
PLAYABILITY: 66% Pick-up-and-play action gaming fun.
LONGEVITY: 54% Good starting levels and some tricky later ones.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 58%







» Sadly, this rather natty jumper Jason 'Kenz' Mackenzie is modelling is one of a kind. His mother made it for him.



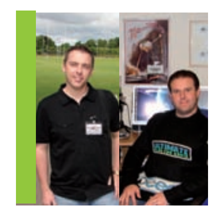
» Homebrew coder, Jon Wells takes time out to pose at this year's Retro Fusion '08 event.





HOMEBREW HEROES

PSYTRONIK SOFTWARE



WE'RE AT IT AGAIN, TRACKING DOWN THE COMPANIES AND INDIVIDUALS THAT SUPPORT OUR HOMEBREW COMMUNITY. THIS MONTH WE SPEAK TO JASON 'KENZ' MACKENZIE AND JON WELLS OF PSYTRONIK SOFTWARE

How has the relaunch of Psytronik Software been?
Jason Mackenzie: To quote David Darling, "Absolutely brilliant!" The new Psytronik releases for the Commodore 64 have been really well received. Not only are people enjoying the games but they seem to appreciate all the time and effort put into the new packaging produced for the games. It's very satisfying to be able to present the games with glossy full-colour artwork instead of the photocopied inlays that the original Psytronik games were packaged with. There are now five Psytronik releases available with more to come. Keep an eye on www.psytronik.com for details.

What do you look for when publishing a game?
JM: Various factors are taken into consideration for a Psytronik release – most important of which is the gameplay. Presentation is secondary, but if the game looks great as well then that certainly helps. I'm looking to publish games on different formats as well as the C64 so if any of your readers have made a good game for the Speccy, Amstrad CPC, VIC-20 or Atari 8-bits then get in touch. My email address is kenz@binaryzone.org.

What's your involvement with Binary Zone PD?
JM: I set up BZPD back in 1990 primarily as a disk-based Public Domain library for C64 users. It expanded really quickly and I soon had well over 4,000 members and shipped disks to 30 different countries! During my time running BZPD I also extended the range to support tape users, published 16 issues of a C64 fanzine called *Commodore Zone* and released games on the Psytronik label. In 1998 Binary Zone went 'interactive' when I launched www.binaryzone.org. The site now features a spanky retro store filled with Binary Zone-related goodies including retro music CDs and DVDs, retro game posters and, of course, the Psytronik games.

Tell us a little about 'One Man And His Mic'…
JM: 'OMAHM' is a series of one-hour retro-game music podcasts. Each show has a specific theme and is either devoted to a particular retro computer system, 8-bit musician or retro game. There are now ten shows available which you can download for free from www.binaryzone.org/podcast.

How did you both get into the homebrew scene?
JM: My productions have *always* been pretty homebrew! It started with Binary Zone in 1990, which involved a lot of work compiling and shipping PD disks. *Commodore Zone* was also a very home-made production! Psytronik Software was a natural progression from the PD library that allowed coders to release their games on a proper software label rather than as PD.

You work a lot with Jon Wells. How did this collaboration come about?
JM: *Sceptre Of Baghdad* was our first major collaboration and this led on to various other projects including the production of loads of great software for my *Commodore Zone* covermounts. I actually lost touch with Jon for a good few years, but I was delighted to hear from him earlier this year when he contacted me regarding his *The Wild Bunch* project. We're now working together again just like the old times!

How did you get into coding?
Jon Wells: I got a Spectrum on my 14th birthday and initially, after playing many great games, was curious as to how it was all done, so I started out typing BASIC listings from books and magazines. Later I got a C64 and continued to study BASIC in more detail, but it was when I started college in 1988 that things really progressed. With programming books in hand we spent hours between courses and in the evenings hacking into games, looking at how the machine code was developed and changing things to see the results. It was really great fun and a definite learning curve!

What's your favourite machine to code on? Why?
JW: My favourite retro machine to date coding-wise would be the Game Boy Color. It was Z80 machine code programmable – just like the Amstrad/Spectrum – but with inner workings, a sound chip and built-in sprites and graphics modes that were very similar, too. It reminded me of programming on the C64/128!

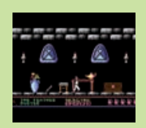
How long does a title take you to turn around?
JW: This varies considerably and depends on the complexity and deadlines. For instance, it took just four days to do *Shaolin* on the C64, while *Sceptre Of Baghdad* took a year and a half! On the Game Boy Color I programmed *Space Invasion* in four months, while I only had a two-month deadline to turn around *International Karate Advanced* on the GBA.

Can you tell us about any future projects?
JW: Yes, I'm presently working on a conversion with Kenz of the classic Spectrum/Amstrad Firebird game *The Wild Bunch* for the Commodore 64. After this I'll be doing the next Sideways SEUCK project.

Why do you think that the homebrew scene is so popular?
JW: For us it's all about nostalgia and going back to your roots. Those were great times that hold fond memories, so doing homebrew projects is our contribution to bringing something new to the retro scene – for those people to enjoy who still support it to this day.

Tell us a little about the *Wild Bunch* project you're both working on…
JW: It's a conversion I attempted in early 1988, which after a bit of prodding by Frank Gasking of GTW [Games That Weren't] has been resurrected. A limited edition will be released for collectors and the conversion is to be made as authentic as possible – right down to the packaging. And Kenz was called upon to rejoin the old team and assist in development, including the website, packaging, mastering and so on, while I take care of the coding. There's a full development diary at: www.gamesplaygames.co.uk/thewildbunch.

FIVE 'TRONIK GAMES



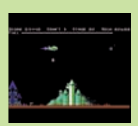
Sceptre Of Baghdad (Psytronik Software)
Jon approached Atlantis with a proposal to do the Spectrum conversion, which was a really good budget release. A contract was drawn up, but unfortunately Atlantis sunk just before it was released, so it was published via Kenz on his Psytronik label.



Archetype (Psytronik Software)
This was a game produced by Swedish SEUCK legend Alf Yngve that was specially enhanced by Jon to include extra power-ups, improved front-end presentation and high-score table along with new 'Get Ready' and 'Game Over' screens.



Sideways SEUCK Project
Jon had many requests from Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit fans over the years about a sideways-scrolling version, so he secretly adapted Sensible Software's classic editor to work horizontally and unleashed it earlier this year to much approval.



Blitz 3000 (Commodore Zone)
A remake of a remake of the classic bomb-dropping, building-busting *Blitz* game. This release was originally inspired by Mastertronic's *Challenger* game, and was released as a covermount and coded for Kenz's *Commodore Zone* magazine.



The Ultimate Martin Galway Collection (BZPD)
Working with former Apex member Andy Roberts, Jon and Kenz laboured to produce a definitive collection of Martin Galway tunes on the C64. Andy wrote the menus, Jon coded the players and Kenz tested it with his ears.

THE RITMAN FILES

He's created some of the greatest isometric adventures of all time, but what's Jon Ritman up to now? Darran Jones travels into the heart of Kent in order to find out.

MORE EXCITING FEATURES

» Jonti Davies concludes his flights of fancy with the *Panzer Dragoon* dev team by taking an in-depth look at *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, easily the best game in the franchise.

» More MicroProse hijinks as we examine the huge success the simulation and strategy company had during the Nineties, and the moments that led to its eventual demise.

» Often overlooked in favour of Commodore's Amiga, we spend a month championing the Atari ST and explain why you really need to own this underrated 16-bit wonder.

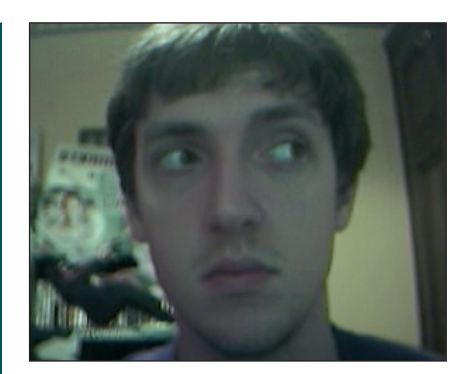
retro GAMER

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RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO GARETH CHAPPELL ABOUT HIS NEW WEBSITE RETRO 101…



RG: When did you set up Retro 101?
Gareth Chappell: Retro 101 is very new to the world. Toby and I decided to set the website up and it launched in February with a host of *Castlevania* reviews and features. We decided to set it up because of the recent resurgence in retro gaming helped by all of the major consoles having their own services that deliver classic games to a whole new set of gamers. With this in mind we have sections that cover downloadable games, as well as new games in old franchises, features and, of course, real retro games on classic systems.

RG: Why did you decide to base it around everything rather than a specific machine?
GC: We are trying to capture the feel and nostalgia of the fun of retro gaming rather than focus too much on any one area. It doesn't matter if you used to play on an Amstrad or a PlayStation, we just want people to be able to read something on the site that reminds them of just how much fun it is to play a really good game. We have access to all of these great titles and we just want to get the word out about as many of them as we can.

> "MOST OF OUR READERS DROP BY TO CHECK ON THE LATEST RETRO NEWS"

RG: What would you say gives Retro 101 the edge over similar websites?
GC: The site has a different attitude to many others out there. To start with we only really concentrate on the games. We will leave the stats and specifications of machines to others. We also try to keep a good mix of rare and well-known titles. Our reviews concentrate on telling you why a retro game is, or isn't, still fun to play today, there are no rose-tinted glasses on display here. As well as this we are very open-minded. If one of our reviewers wants to come in and say *Castlevania 64* was a great game we would let them as long as they can back it up in their review. We would draw the line at *Rise Of The Robots* though.

RG: What's the most popular part of the site?
GC: As much as I want to say it's our reviews and features, the truth of the matter is that most of our regular readers drop by to check on the latest retro news on the front page. That said our in-depth *Castlevania* articles still draw many people to the site.

RG: How can our readers contribute?
GC: At the moment the main thing we need from people is simply to visit the site and comment on the articles and stories we're putting up. We are looking to expand to a forum soon and once we get the site settled we will need a PS3-owning reviewer to help cover the PSN side of things. We wouldn't say no if any developers on XBLA or the Virtual Console are reading this and want to send us redemption codes for their games either. At the minute everything we review comes from our own collections.

RG: What's your favourite game and why?
GC: As much as I would like to come out and say some obscure game on the Amstrad, like the excellent *Tubaruba*, the truth is that I think the best game of all time is *Final Fantasy VII*. I don't think any other game has ever produced such a magical adventure to be undertaken. Square may have milked the franchise dry now but at the time the game really was a revolution. Without it many excellent RPGs would have remained a mystery to me.

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Retro 101
www.retro101.co.uk



Unlike many of the featured sites in the directory, Retro 101 has only been around for about ten months, making it one of the youngest websites we cover. Don't let its age fool you, though, as there's some sterling stuff to be found within its HTML code. As well as covering some of the biggest franchises in gaming history, Retro 101 also has a bustling reviews section with a selection of great, articulately written pieces. The fact that co-owner Gareth Chappell loves the Amstrad nearly as much as we do has nothing to do with it.

The site itself is still light on content, but what is here is of a high quality. Check it out if you're after something that's a little different from the norm. You won't be disappointed.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site with every machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum catering for an Aussie audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

C64 GAME ENDINGS
www.c64endings.co.uk/
Over 260 endings for classic and not so classic C64 games.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
This great Amiga site is run by Kim Lemon, owner of Lemon 64.

MAC RETRO
www.macretro.tk
Getting emulators up and running on the Mac, this is a brilliant site.

NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's systems, but with lots of other stuff to enjoy.

WEEKEND GAMER
www.weekend-gamer.co.uk
Great site that covers a range of topics, from TV to gaming.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Sega focused, but also dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
This site is devoted to imports, but there's a retro section with useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you think the 2600 is ancient, visit this fascinating site.

RETRO MUSEUM
www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk
What's interesting about this is that very soon it will be a physical place you can visit.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega.

SEGA-16.COM
www.sega-16.com
Mega Drive site with some incredibly in-depth interviews.

RETRO 101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's fairly new, but Retro 101 has some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game market.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
This brilliant site loves shmups of all descriptions.

SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely amazing website dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your one-stop shop for everything VC-related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory, please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

03

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

KICK OFF 2

ANDY B KICKS SENSI INTO TOUCH



- » **PUBLISHER:** ANCO
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI ST
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

Kick Off 2 **is the reason why I'm crap at football today… I spent hours playing this game when I should have been outside kicking an Adidas Tango around with my pals!**

There are many things that set *Kick Off 2* apart from the footy games that came before and after it. The most obvious being its pace, which probably put many people off the game initially. Another is the way the ball doesn't 'stick' to your players' feet, as had been the convention in earlier football games.

However, perseverance (and practising at 50 per cent speed) eventually pays off and you'll be so glad you stuck with it when it does. Suddenly, what had been frustrating battles to keep control of the ball become skilfully orchestrated passing moves. As you get to know your team's formation and each player's strengths, your confidence grows, seeing you spread cross-field passes to that speedy winger on the left (R Shaw!) or keeping it on the deck and playing it through the middle to the feet of your star striker to turn and shoot from 30 yards.

Kick Off 2 has the usual friendlies, leagues and cups, plus a 'World Cup' finals. There is no endorsement by FIFA or the FA so the teams are made up of imaginary players. However, it doesn't try to imitate real life by using famous player names spelt incorrectly (I'm looking at you, *Sensible Soccer* and *ISS Pro Evolution*).

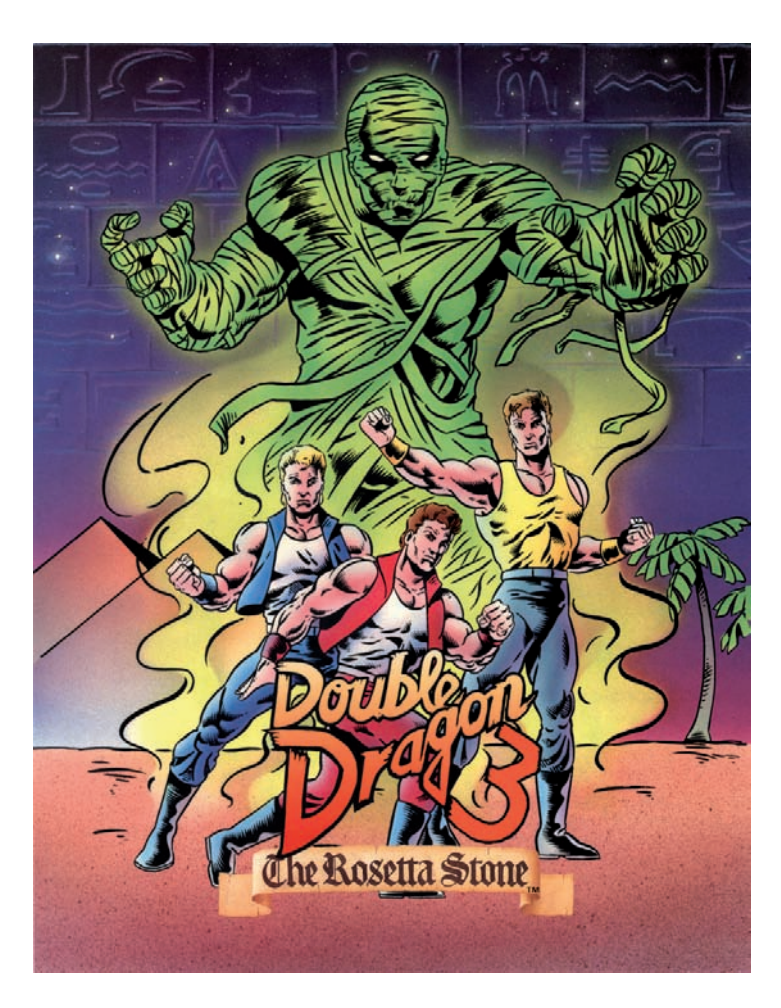
Ultimately, it's how the game performs on the pitch that counts and once you've mastered the 'beautiful game' you'll find there really is no substitute for *Kick Off 2*. Add in the classic 'after touch' allowing you to bend and dip your shots, and a randomness to the action – if the ball hits the frame of the goal, you never quite know where it will rebound to – and you end up with a classic footy game that still plays well today. It may not look as pretty as other football games, but this just adds to the charm and suggests that more development time was spent perfecting gameplay rather than aesthetics – substance over style.

Final score… *Kick Off 2, Sensible Soccer* nil!

Want to appear in the magazine? Then be sure to upload classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

7 R.SHAW


RETROBATE PROFILE
» NAME: ANDY BOLD
» JOINED: 24 JUL 2008
» LOCATION: SOLIHULL
» OCCUPATION: EMBEDDED SOFTWARE ENGINEER
» FAV GAMES SYSTEM: COULDN'T POSSIBLY CHOOSE A FAV!
» BIO: BBC TO NES TO ST/MEGA DRIVE/SNES… THEN ONCE I WAS EARNING A WAGE, PSONE, N64, SATURN, DREAMCAST, JAGUAR GBA SP, LYNX…



DOUBLE DRAGON 3

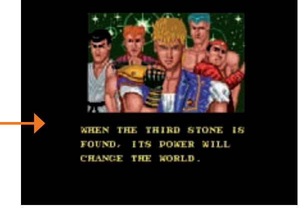
Billy and Jimmy's third mission found them jet-setting around the globe to destroy an ancient evil. And it turns out the greedy buggers aren't doing this for a girl, starving orphans or for world peace, but to get filthy stinking rich (tssk)…











SCREEN 1
When our heroes finally enter Cleopatra's tomb they're greeted by a giant mummy. It'll ask Billy and Jimmy to join him for a soak in its nice new hot tub, meaning your first job is to decide whether or not to accept the offer.

SCREEN 2
Following your rejection, the mummy reveals itself to be Cleopatra. Gutted that they didn't take her up on the offer, Billy and Jimmy set about knocking this huge woman unconscious so they can get their hands on her giant chest.

SCREEN 3
With the battle won our heroes finally get their reward – a huge novelty treasure chest containing enough gold to cover the wages of one Premiership footballer for a whole seven minutes. Well done, fellas. Well done.

SCREEN 4
Realising that they've got no way of actually getting the treasure back home, the boys decide that the noble thing to do would be to give all the money to charity. Maybe these guys aren't so bad after all. Dumb, yes, but bad, no.

SCREEN 5
Oh yes, the stones, we almost forgot. It turns out the guys are doing this for world peace. Geez, it looks like we got Jimmy and Billy all wrong. Godspeed boys, venture out and find that final stone, mankind's counting on you.